



NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE PARLIAMENT OF
THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC
OF GUYANA

OFFICIAL REPORT

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2020-2025) OF THE TWELFTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE DOME OF THE ARTHUR CHUNG CONFERENCE CENTRE, LILIENDAAL, GREATER GEORGETOWN

13TH Sitting

Tuesday, 29TH September, 2020

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

The Assembly convened at 10.16 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (70)

Speaker (1)

*Hon. Manzoor Nadir, M.P.,
*Speaker of the National Assembly,
Parliament Office,
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Brickdam,
Georgetown.*

MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT (37)

(i) MEMBERS OF THE PEOPLE'S PROGRESSIVE PARTY/CIVIC (PPP/C) (37)

Prime Minister (1)

+ Hon. Brigadier (Ret'd) Mark Anthony Phillips, M.S.S., M.P.,
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Vice-President (1)

+ Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo, M.P.,
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Office of the President,
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[Absent]

+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Speaker**

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (1)

+ Hon. Mohabir Anil Nandlall, M.P.,
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Senior Ministers (16)

+ Hon. Gail Teixeira, M.P.,
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Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance,
Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance.
Government Chief Whip,
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+ Hon. Hugh H. Todd, M.P.,
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Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation,
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+ Hon. Bishop Juan A. Edghill, M.S., J.P., M.P.,
Minister of Public Works,
Ministry of Public Works,
Wight's Lane,
Kingston,
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Dr. Frank C. S. Anthony, M.P.,
Minister of Health,
Ministry of Health,
Brickdam,
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+ **Cabinet Member**

+ Hon. Priya D. Manickchand, M.P.,
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+ *Hon. Brindley H.R. Benn, M.P.,
Minister of Home Affairs,
Ministry of Home Affairs,
Brickdam,
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+ Hon. Zulfikar Mustapha, M.P.,
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+ Hon. Joseph L.F. Hamilton, M.P.,
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+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Minister**

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+*Hon. Oneidge Walrond, M.P.,
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Ministry of Public Works,
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Mr. Lee G.H. Williams, M.P.,
*Paruima Upper Mazaruni,
c/o Freedom House,
Robb Street,
Georgetown.*

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South Cummingsburg,
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*Mr. Vikash Ramkissoon, M.P.,
*Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Agriculture,
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Bourda, Georgetown.*

Ms. Bhagmattie Veerasammy, M.P.,
*Lot 32 Crown Dam,
Industry,
East Coast Demerara.*

MEMBERS OF THE OPPOSITION (32)

(i) A Partnership For National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) (31)

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Joseph F. Harmon, M.S.M., M.P., <i>Leader of the Opposition, Lot 99 Mazaruni Street, Guyhoc Park, Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Absent - on Leave]</i>
Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, M.P., <i>Lot 10 Delph Street, Campbelville, Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Absent - on Leave]</i>
Mr. Roysdale A. Forde, M.P., <i>Lot 410 Caneview Avenue, South Ruimveldt, Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Absent - on Leave]</i>
Mr. Raphael G.C. Trotman, M.P., <i>Lot 3202 Pricese 3, Providence, East Bank Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent - on Leave]</i>
Ms. Dawn Hastings-Williams, M.P., <i>Lot 933 Block 1, Eccles, East Bank Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent - on Leave]</i>
Dr. Nicolette O. Henry, M.P., <i>Lot 2227 Ozama Street, North Ruimveldt, Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Absent - on Leave]</i>
Dr. Karen R.V. Cummings, M.P., <i>Lot 2 Belfield Housing Scheme, East Coast Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent - on Leave]</i>
Ms. Tabitha J. Sarabo-Halley, M.P., <i>Lot 3382 Caneview Avenue, South Ruimveldt Park, Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Absent - on Leave]</i>
Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond, M.P., <i>Lot 48 Atlantic Ville, Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Absent - on Leave]</i>
Mr. Christopher A. Jones, M.P., <i>Opposition Chief Whip, Lot 609 Conciliation Street, Tucville, Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Absent - on Leave]</i>
Ms. Annette N. Ferguson, M.P., <i>Lot 842 Eccles, East Bank Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent - on Leave]</i>

Mr. David A. Patterson, M.P., <i>Lot 151 Durbana Square, Lamaha Gardens, Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Absent - on Leave]</i>
Ms. Coretta A. McDonald, M.P., <i>Lot 202 N, Fourth Street, Alexander Village, Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Absent - on Leave]</i>
Ms. Catherine A. Hughes, M.P., <i>(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica), Lot 13 A, New Providence, East Bank Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent - on Leave]</i>
Mr. Haimraj B. Rajkumar, M.P., <i>Lot 18 Public Road, Johanna Cecilia, (Region # 2 Essequibo Coast).</i>	<i>[Absent - on Leave]</i>
Ms. Amanza O.R. Walton-Desir, M.P., <i>Lot 1285 EE Eccles Sugarcane Field, East Bank Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent - on Leave]</i>
Ms. Natasha Singh-Lewis, M.P., <i>Lot 1110 Plot 'B', Herstelling, East Bank Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent - on Leave]</i>
Mr. Sherod A. Duncan, M.P., <i>Lot 590 Good Hope, East Coast Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent - on Leave]</i>
Ms. Juretha V. Fernandes, M.P., <i>Lot 1282 Block EE, Eccles, East Bank Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent - on Leave]</i>
Mr. Vincent P. Henry, M.P., <i>(Region No. 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo), Shulidnab Village, South Central, Rupununi. (Culvert City Lethem)</i>	<i>[Absent - on Leave]</i>
Mr. Ronald Cox, M.P., <i>(Region No. 1 – Barima Waini), Mabaruma Compound.</i>	<i>[Absent - on Leave]</i>

Mr. Shurwayne F.K. Holder, M.P., (Region No. 2 – Pomeroon/Supenaam), Lot 55 Henrietta, Essequibo Coast.	[Absent - on Leave]
Mr. Ganesh A. Mahipaul, M.P., Lot 14 Plantain Walk, West Bank Demerara.	[Absent - on Leave]
Ms. Nima N. Flue-Bess, M.P., (Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica), Lot 88 Nelson Street, Mocha Village, East Bank Demerara.	[Absent - on Leave]
Ms. Maureen A. Philadelphia, M.P., (Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica), Lot 17 Block 1, Section F, Plantation Belfield, East Coast Demerara.	[Absent - on Leave]
Mr. Deonarine Ramsaroop, M.P., (Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica), Lot 40 Block 3 Craig Milne, Cove & John, East Coast Demerara.	[Absent - on Leave]
Mr. Vinceroy H. Jordan, M.P., (Region No. 5 – Mahaica/Berbice), Lot 214 Lovely Lass Village, West Coast Berbice. C/o Christopher Jones	[Absent - on Leave]
Mr. Dineshwar N. Jaiprashad, M.P., Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne), Lot 80 Babu John Road, Haswell, Port Mourant, Corentyne Berbice.	[Absent - on Leave]
Mr. Richard E. Sinclair, M.P., (Region No. 8 –Potaro/Siparuni) Church Street Mahdia. Lot 4 Public Road, Stewartville, West Coast Demerara.	[Absent - on Leave]

Mr. Jermaine Figueira, M.P.,
(Region No. 10 – Upper Demerara/Upper Berbice),
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Silvertown,
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[Absent - on Leave]

Mr. Devin L. Sears, M.P.,
(Region No. 10 – Upper Demerara/Upper Berbice),
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Wismar, Linden.

[Absent - on Leave]

(ii) A New and United Guyana, Liberty and Justice Party and The New Movement (ANUG, LJP & TNM) (1)

Mr. Lenox R. O'Dell Shuman, M.P.,
Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly,
St. Cuthbert's Mission,
Soesdyke Linden Highway.

[Virtual Participation]

Officers (2)

Mr. Sherlock E. Isaacs, A.A.,
Clerk of the National Assembly,
Parliament Office,
Public Buildings,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

Ms. Deslyn West,
Assistant Clerk of the National Assembly,
Parliament Office,
Public Buildings,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

Hansard Division Officers (20)

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Chief Editor

Ms. Marlyn Jeffers-Morrison,
Senior Editor

Ms. Shawnel Cudjoe,
Senior Editor (ag)

Ms. Latoiah Joseph,
Senior Editor (ag)

Ms. Carol Bess,
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Ms. Shevona Telford,
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Ms. Christina Ramroop,
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Ms. Tesia Ellis,
Reporter

Ms. Indranie Persaud,
Reporter

Ms. Roseina Singh,
Reporter

Ms. Somna Karen-Muridall,
Reporter

Ms. Eyoka Gibson,
Reporter

Ms. Lushonn Bess,
Reporter

Ms. Bianca Cummings,
Reporter

Mr. Rohan Ramjas,
Reporter

Ms. Nadeila Allen,
Reporter

Ms. Celisa DeFlorimonte,
Reporter

Mr. Parmanand Singh,
Pre –Press Technician

Mr. Saeed Umrao,
Audio Technician

Mr. Daison Horsham,
Audio Technician

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ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER**Virtual Participation by Deputy Speaker**

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the Deputy Speaker will be joining us virtually. He has asked me to convey to you that he did his Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) test and that he is negative. We want to say congratulations to him on staying healthy.

Leave granted to Members of the APNU/AFC

Also, the Members of Parliament (MP) for the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) have asked for leave from today's sitting.

PUBLIC BUSINESS**GOVERNMENT BUSINESS****BILLS- Second and Third Readings****(1) Auctioneers (Amendment) Bill 2020 – Bill No. 2/2020**

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Auctioneers Act.”

[*Minister of Public Works*]

Minister of Public Works [Bishop Edghill]: Mr. Speaker, I rise to move that the Auctioneers (Amendment) Bill 2020 – Bill No. 2 of 2020, published on the 21st September, 2020, be now read a second time.

This Bill seeks to amend the Auctioneers Act, Cap 91:07, by decreasing the licence fees to be paid for an auctioneer's licence by 50% of the previously increased amount, thereby reducing it from \$40,000 to \$23,500. We are seeking to bring this into effect or into operation on 1st October, 2020.

Mr. Speaker, as you are aware, the increase to \$40,000 from a mere \$7,000 was done in 2016, which really amounted to a 500% increase. This Bill and the effect of its reversal is part of our manifesto promises. This was one of the draconian increases that was imposed by the APNU/AFC, when they were really hurting the ordinary man by the imposition and increases in fees for licences.

When we left Government in 2015, the fee for the licence of an auctioneer was \$7,000. When they brought this measure into place in 2016, that is the APNU/AFC, they moved the cost of a licence from \$7,000 to \$40,000 – a 500% increase.

I can understand why they are not here today. It is because every Bill and every motion that will be addressed in this honourable House would basically highlight their insensitive actions and how they hurt the ordinary man. This measure is really a reversal by 50%. So, in effect, this will decrease the fees in the amount of \$16,500, thereby allowing the auctioneer to reduce his fees to the public and, also, at the same time, provide more cash flow into the hands of the auctioneer and the Guyanese public.

This burdensome fee on all licences amounts to hundreds of fees imposed in the last five years by the previous Administration. I recall us debating in the last Parliament and seeking to highlight the hardships and the difficulties that people would face with the imposition of these increases. Today, however, as I stand to ask that the Bill be read a second time, we are indicating and signalling, by way of this Bill, that we are standing true to our word. What we said, we will do. This is a reversal of the hardship measures imposed by the Granger Administration. This is fulfilling a manifesto promise.

I ask that and I move that the Bill be read a second time. I am certain that some of my Colleagues will be speaking in support of this measure. It should not escape our attention that an Administration that stood up here and sought to glorify and defend its record, which really brought hardships on the people of Guyana, is not here today to defend these Bills. Do you know why? It is because, while the economy was not able to attract significant foreign direct investment and while they were unable to be innovative and create new revenue streams, what they did, in order to keep moneys for Government expenditure, was to put their hands in the ordinary man's pocket by way of taxation, increasing fees and the rest of it. We have come today to correct that wrong.

Today, the entire process of these Bills is to be deemed: PPP/C correcting wrongs done; PPP/C giving back to the people of Guyana; and PPP/C keeping faith with the ordinary working man to ensure that their fees and licences are affordable.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, let us just check with the Deputy Speaker to see if he is going to make a contribution. He is on, virtually, so let me check with the staff.

He said no. I now call on the Hon. Member, Ms. Sonia Parag.

Minister of the Public Service [Ms. Parag]: Mr. Speaker, it is no secret that, over the last five years, the APNU/AFC Administration sought to callously impose several tax measures, which undoubtedly caused hardships on Guyanese. Today, through the several Bills that will be presented to this honourable House, will prove to Guyanese that the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Administration is once again committed to the welfare of all Guyanese, by reversing and reducing those draconian tax measures that were previously imposed.

With respect to Bill No. 2 of 2020, the Auctioneers (Amendment) Bill, if I may say this: the driving force behind the economy, the business community, was heavily affected by the imposition of these tax measures. This was no different for auctioneers who previously prospered from gains or profits from sales. A quick scan of the records of the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) has shown that, in 2009, there was one licence issued to an auctioneer. In 2020, that has reduced to zero. In previous years, there would have been a lot more. This is just to show that, from 2016, the amendment of the Principal Act, Cap 91:07 of the Laws of Guyana, the Auctioneers Act, by the then Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan, sought to put an exorbitant fee of \$40,000 on auctioneers. The fact that there was one in 2019 and zero in 2020 has shown, over the years, that particular business has deteriorated to zero because of the hardship the increase in that fee has imposed on auctioneers.

10.31 a.m.

Now, if I am to give an example, if an auctioneer has to pay \$40,000 for a licence to have a vehicle sold, because of that, the bidding has to start at a higher bid than it would normally, if the licence fee was less. As one bids, the purchaser or the intended purchaser, realises that when he or she is bidding, the higher the amount goes, he or she is paying more money for less value. So that discourages a buyer and that is what we have seen. The auctioneer spends \$40,000 on his licence and he or she is left with that vehicle at the end of the day and makes no profit. So, really and truly, that is the hardship which has been placed on that specific business.

The PPP/C is looking to reduce that \$40,000 to approximately \$23,500, which will incentivise businesses. It will have a trickle-down effect as well. This is because there will now be more auctioneers coming forward and there will be employment for other persons. That is the trickle-down effect and that is significant of a healthy economy.

Like most of the other unconscionable tax impositions, we have also seen the deterioration of the auctioneer's business. As a result, the proposal of Auctioneers (Amendment) Bill of 2020 will benefit the Guyanese economy heavily because it will create employment and it will incentivise that business. For that reason, I propose that this Bill be favourable to this House. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Bill considered and approved.

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported without amendments, read the third time and passed as printed.

(2) Corporation Tax (Amendment) Bill 2020 – Bill No. 3/2020

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Corporation Tax Act.”

[*Minister of Public Works*]

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Speaker, I rise to move that the Corporation Tax (Amendment) Bill 2020 – Bill No. 3 of 2020, published on 21st September, 2020, be now read a second time.

This Bill seeks to exempt corporation taxes on private corporate education institutions and on private corporate medical healthcare institutions. It recommends the removal of the 25% corporation tax existing on private corporate education institutions and on private corporate medical healthcare institutions. Such a removal will make it a more profitable venture to attract quality educational investments, which will result in greater access to learning opportunities across all fields of study.

Additionally, the 25% corporation tax on private corporate medical healthcare institutions and services will make it more affordable for the average Guyanese and will attract specialty healthcare services to the country. This measure seeks to address improvement, affordability and access to private educational opportunities, as well as to private medical institutions.

To explain the impact of this measure and how it will benefit the ordinary man, I would like to give you, Mr. Speaker, and the House an example. The removal of the 25% corporate tax on education will allow for this. In order for us to have quality education, which will certainly improve our capacity to be productive, ensuring that we have a skilled labour force, we have to expand opportunities that already exist. In the extending of those opportunities that already exist, affordability is a big issue, and we have to give people choices. Not everybody will want to attend the University of Guyana (UG). In as much as this Budget supports the University of Guyana, people must have options and choices. This measure is intended to attract other institutions of learning and reputable, well-accredited institutions of learning, to set up campuses in Guyana and offer those opportunities to Guyanese, in the first instance.

With this kind of an intervention that we are proposing, where we could attract educational institutions to come and set up campuses here in Guyana for learning, it will also be a major source of earning foreign exchange. When those campuses are established in Guyana, students from around the world, because of the favourable rates that will be offered in Guyana, would be able to make Guyana a destination of choice.

10.46. a.m.

We see that right now with some of the institutions. We have quite a lot of foreign students attending some of these institutions. Every student that comes here, because we are making it more attractive, will have to find apartments to live in, so that is opportunity for Guyanese who are providing that service.

The fact that those students from overseas who are coming to study in Guyana will become residents, they have to spend, which means their families that are supporting them from overseas have to send money to Guyana and that is foreign exchange coming and money in circulation.

This measure alone, just in the educational sector, is providing choices and opportunities to our young professionals and our young people, who are pursuing education at affordable rates because the 25% corporation tax is being waived. This is also to attract reputable, well accredited institutions to set up campuses in Guyana. With that, we can see an inflow of foreign students. We do not have to go too far, just go to Grenada and see what is happening there. The fact that they have accredited educational institutions that attract good quality and foreign

students is a significant contributor to the economy. This measure is creating an architecture to facilitate that in education.

Similarly, when it comes to the removal of corporate tax on private healthcare, combined with the Government's removal of value-added tax (VAT) on medical supplies, it will make healthcare more affordable to the average Guyanese. This is because if the hospital or the healthcare facilities do not have to pay the 25% cooperate tax, persons accessing an ultrasound or a computed axial tomography (CAT) or who have to do their blood tests, the cost will eventually go down and make it more affordable for persons to have choices again. Whether they go to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) or to one of our regional hospitals - this Budget that has just been passed makes provision for improved services in the State-owned institutions - people must, also, have choices. When they seek to access services at private medical institutions, it must be at affordable rates, ensuring that these private medical institutions can survive.

Here again, this measure, also, creates an environment for investment into Guyana by world class medical institutions because this facility of the removal of the 25% corporation tax is an incentive for them to come to Guyana. It means that the range of services, high class medical services, could become available. In an environment of competition, prices will become competitive and affordable.

The forward thinking of this Administration, being led by His Excellency, Dr. Mohamed Irfan Ali, is seeking to put options on the table. Education and health are non-negotiable for our citizens. We believe that every citizen in Guyana must have access to affordable education and healthcare. That is why we make provision to support education and healthcare in the public sector. Here it is that we are also incentivising private, public education and private medical facilities by the removal of the 25% corporation tax.

Once this National Assembly approves this amendment to the law, it will come into operation, because of the nature of it, retroactively, 1st January, 2020. Accordingly, section 7 of the Corporation Tax Act shall be amended to provide, therefore, by the insertion of paragraphs T and U, after paragraph S, the following words:

“The profits of private corporate education institution.”

And, in paragraph U:

“The profits of a corporate medical health care institution.”

We are asking that the House approves this measure. This is a pro-poor, pro-people measure, again, proving the credentials of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, fulfilling its manifesto promises and living true to its word of being pro-poor, pro-people, and ensuring affordability and access. I ask that this Bill be supported. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Nandlall]: I want to begin by recognising the absence of the Members of the other side of this House from these debates and to offer my view, if only for the permanent record of this House, as to why they have chosen to stay away from these debates. It is no doubt that this Bill and the other Bills that are before us today, the orders and the regulations are a compendious of measures, all designed to bring great relief and reprieve to the Guyanese people in the form of removal and reduction of taxes and licence fees. They were all imposed upon the backs of the Guyanese people as a draconian tax policy of the other side when they were in Government. They are faced with that difficult conundrum of being present in the House and to either agree with us that they were wrong, and that they impoverished this nation by those measures, or they sit here and vote against it. History has proven that they always take the easy way out. What is that way? By being absent from these debates. Demonstrating, once again, to the people of Guyana where they stand on the developmental agenda of this country.

It is not a new role, that has been the history of the People’s National Congress (PNC) from its birth. The PPP builds and develops, the PNC destroys and takes us backward. Today, in 2020, they begin the Twelfth Session of this Assembly, demonstrating that nothing has changed. That is my view of their absence here today, but that will not discourage us. We are here, not to do a presentation for them, but to do the people’s business and to demonstrate to the people of Guyana our commitment to their better welfare.

That is why, today, this Assembly is sitting in this special session almost, dedicated towards the delivery of promises which the PPP/C made while we were on the campaign trail and in our manifesto, to remove all the draconian tax measures and to reduce licensing fees imposed by the APNU/AFC while they were in Government.

These measures that we are debating today can be found in various parts of our manifesto. All of us sitting on this side of

the House would have campaigned right across the length and breadth of this country; at the marketplaces, at the street corners, at the rally grounds, at the bottom houses, in the rivers and creeks and at the foot of mountains, telling the Guyanese people that we are going to deliver these promises. Today, we are delivering those promises to the people of our country.

Guyana’s greatest assets, in the eyes of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, are our people. The greatest attribute that a Government can pay to its people is to ensure that they have the highest possible educational standards and the highest possible healthcare standards. A truly rich nation is an educated and healthy nation.

This philosophy of ours, in the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, of investing heavily in the education and health sector is nothing new. It dates back to the PPP/C Governments of the 50s and 60s under colonial rule. It was under the PPP/C Administration, for example, that the University of Guyana, the Guyana School of Agriculture (GSA) and the technical institutes in Georgetown and Berbice were born. All these institutions birthed under the Cheddi Jagan’s Government in the 1960s, were all ground-breaking at the time. There was no university in the West Indies when Dr. Jagan started the University of Guyana. They were all premier educational institutions at the time.

11.01 a.m.

From 1992 to 2015, we continued that ideology and that philosophy of investing heavily in the social sectors in particular, specifically, in the areas of education and health. A quick examination of our budgets from 1992 to 2015 will show, uniformly, that we have dedicated over 20% to 25% of every budget that we passed towards healthcare and education.

In the year 2020, under President Irfaan Ali’s Administration, that trajectory has not only continued but it is on the rise. A whopping \$52 billion has been allocated to the education sector and a staggering \$51.7 billion has been allocated to the health sector in *Budget 2020*. Still, our Government is not satisfied that it is doing enough in the areas of health and education. That is why, over the next five years, in addition to huge budgetary allocations, we will continue to unleash an array of measures to augment education and to enhance healthcare in our country. We will soon restart, for example, the One Laptop Per Family (OLPF) programme to ensure that our students have access to computers.

We will break the telecommunications sector monopoly soon to ensure that we have affordable and accessible internet available to our students. We will bring many specialty hospitals, in the near future, to ensure that our people get specialised healthcare. It is against that backdrop that this simple measure must be located for it to be properly appreciated.

The removal of corporate tax from education and from health puts us in a special category of countries in the Caribbean. We now join countries such as: Bermuda, Bahamas, the Cayman Islands, Panama, Anguilla and the Turks and Caicos that have long removed corporate tax from education and health welfare.

While our Government will continue to invest heavily in the public health sector and in the public education sector, simultaneously, we are creating an environment in the private arena that will make the proliferation of these services, of a particular quality, welcomed in our country.

One of the immediate discernible benefits that will flow from this measure is a reduction of tuition fees of students attending private schools and a reduction of medical expenses if a citizen decides to choose private medical care. Most naturally, this will be a welcomed relief to the people of our country, especially the poor and the working people, as it allows them greater disposable income to spend on other endeavours.

On an average, a student at a private school or secondary school pays more than \$300,000 per annum in tuition. My Hon. Colleague has close affinity to private education institutions, and he can, of course, confirm what I am saying. The removal of corporate taxes from private education institutions saves each student approximately \$75,000 per annum, and this figure is not inclusive of tertiary education and private lessons. With an approximate 10,000 private students, this will represent a transfer of more than \$750 million, conservatively, to households throughout this country.

The *Bank of Guyana 2018 Annual Report* shows that health services accounted for \$7.96 billion alone. The removal of corporate taxes from private healthcare will see a transfer totalling more than \$950 million, which will inevitably be passed down to consumers, making almost all private health services automatically cheaper by 25%.

As the Hon. Bishop Edghill explained, this is merely part of the Government's larger vision for the creation of a

destination in Guyana for primary, secondary and specialised healthcare and education. We want to make Guyana the academic and healthcare hub of the Caribbean. That is the vision of our Administration.

The Bishop spoke about the St. George's University in Grenada and that is only one example of what a singular investment can do. With the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) here and with the tourism sector performing at its worst, St. George's University has become a fundamental component of the economic foundation of Grenada. This is because of the thousands of students and parents who live and visit there on a regular basis.

The Hon. Minister of Education, Ms. Manickchand, and yours truly have been directed by His Excellency, President Irfaan Ali, to begin discussions with the University of the West Indies (UWI) and the Council of Legal Education (CLE) in the Caribbean, with a view of attracting their presence in Guyana. That is part of the vision. We have begun to work towards that objective of making Guyana that attractive destination for educational and healthcare provision in this part of the world.

Therefore, this Bill is simply the *tip of the iceberg* of what is to come in the health and education sectors. We are simply laying a part of the foundation of a grand plan for the education and healthcare sectors that we will unfold within the next five years.

There is absolutely no reason this Bill should not be supported by the entire House. I thank you very much. [Applause]

Minister within the Ministry of Public works [Mr. Indar]: My two Colleagues clearly outlined the vision that the Dr. Irfaan Ali-led Administration has for Guyana. A small part of it is being looked at today. This morning, as the Explanatory Memorandum was read by the Hon. Minister, Bishop Juan Edghill, he spoke about the removal of the 25% corporation tax on education.

Education is developmental because of what it did for our countries throughout civilisation. Universities and schools are developed and, most times, the best universities are placed in close proximity to stock markets. As one comes out of university and goes into the business sector, wealth is generated in the business sector and that circle continues.

In Guyana, we are behind the curb. The Hon. Member, Mr. Nandlall, listed a number of countries that already have these

kinds of measures for education. Our country, right now, is suffering from the loss of a whole lot of skillsets. That can now be remedied with the advent of the passing of this Bill, which reduces one's tax bill. The 25% on the profits that one would generate, would not be taxed and can now be transferred to students. How can this be done? It is a simple measure. If one is saving money from one's operations, that money can be translated to cheaper rate per child. Cheaper rate per child helps parents. Regardless of which part of the education strata one is serving, whether it is from nursery straight up to university level, that savings could be translated into savings per child.

Right now, the cost for education in Guyana versus the cost in the Caribbean varies but, with this measure, it will clearly send a signal that we intend to develop our people in these areas. I will list a few: Technical and Vocation and Training (TVET) Schools - we have some of the technical skills and we need to develop them quickly because, right now, Guyana is venturing into an oil and gas society. There are skillsets that are needed right now, which we do not have, to give our people jobs. How can we get these skill sets? They can be brought into Guyana by various schools, either trade schools, university or whatever it is.

I have seen this in countries where there are oil and gas economies. I have ventured into Newfoundland in Canada. In that Province, there are a lot of trade schools that benefit from incentives that the government gives. Those schools are needed here too. If a country is in the oil and gas sector it will need helicopter ditching training, and it will need Standards of Training, certification and Watchkeeping for Seafarers (STCW) training for persons to venture out on a vessel to go offshore. Those skills are not in Guyana. Those certifications are not granted in Guyana.

With the advent of the passing of this Bill and incentivising the education sector for investment in Guyana, those skills could now be set up here and it can be done at an attractive venture. It will give Guyanese the opportunity to study and be trained for jobs that they are not getting right now – jobs that are going to foreigners and from which our people are not benefitting.

Law schools, business schools, medical schools, drilling schools, chemical engineering schools, mechanical engineering schools, civil works schools are all areas we can venture into and in which the private sector can invest so that we can transfer the skills to our people.

The removal of 25% of corporation tax that currently applies will see reserves for schools growing, since it will be effective from 1st January, 2020.

11.16 a.m.

It will see reserves that would have had to go into Government's hand stay in the pocket of the private sector. That money can be reinvested for existing schools to further expand.

In addition to the removal of the corporation tax for private education, I will go into the healthcare sector. The removal of the 25% tax on private medical healthcare facilities or institutions is part of our manifesto. We arrived in Parliament and Government through a political process. We went to the people of Guyana and we said that we would remove all of the draconian and hardship measures which were placed on them by the previous Government. This is one step in that direction.

If one looks at tax regimes throughout the Caribbean, Guyana is placed as having one of the highest tax rate regimes. Because of that, Guyana has been short-changed with new foreign direct investment over a number of years. The simple reason is that, when any investor sits and looks at a market potential value (MPV) analysis or he looks at a business case justification of whether to come into our country to make an investment to carry on business, the tax rate is a disincentive to that investor. Investors stay away from Guyana. By the removal of this 25% tax on medical institutions operating here, it gives a whole new opening for a whole new set of services.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, we have medical capabilities in institutions, in Government and in the private sector, but, as we speak, there is a need for reduction in prices for services, especially in the area of cardiology. I have experienced this. Cardiology services in Guyana, especially in private healthcare sector, is very expensive. With the advent of the removal of the 25% corporation tax, that can be factored into a reduction in cost per units charged to Guyanese citizens.

Bypass surgery is a very expensive thing. This reduction in taxation can find its way back to the cost per unit a hospital charges the patients.

Orthopaedic services - I am a person who suffers from gout. When I go to the hospital, the prices are very expensive. I have suffered with this, just as many thousands of other

Guyanese who suffer from this. This reduction in corporation tax can see reduction in prices for services.

We can have cancer screening. We can have early check-ups for diabetes to make sure that as persons are getting worse, they can do something about it. It is because diabetes and all spin-off sicknesses that come from diabetes can have the cost per unit, charged by private institutions, reduced.

The private market in Guyana is a very competitive one. Although persons want the best healthcare for their family and loved ones, they want to go to an institution that they can afford. They will try to get the best healthcare for their family, but they do not want the bill to be a big worry for them. This is in the right direction of reducing the services that we are providing to our citizens.

Apart from this, there are other measures in the other Bills that will come to the floor that will also see the removal of VAT from certain services. Those, added to this, will carry down the cost for healthcare for citizens of this country.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I look for support of this Bill in the House today.

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Members. Again, I want to propose that we take both clauses of the Bill together.

Clauses 1 and 2

Clauses 1 and 2 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Bill considered and approved.

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported without amendments, read a third time and passed as printed.

(3) Hucksters Licensing and Control (Amendment) Bill 2020 – Bill No. 4/2020

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Hucksters Licensing and Control Act.”

[*Minister of Public Works*]

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Speaker, I rise to move that the Hucksters Licensing and Control (Amendment) Bill 2020 – Bill No. 4/2020, published on 21st September, 2020, be now read a second time.

I recall debating this Bill, in its previous dispensation, when everything was taxed. A man walking on foot and selling clothes had to pay a tax. A man peddling the snow cone cart was taxed. I remember when we used to go to school there was something called *badam lacha*. The *badam lacha* man had to pay a tax. The dray cart man had to pay a tax. They are the vendors, the hucksters, the hustlers or whatever you want to call them. The Granger Administration, because of the lack of vision, their inability to innovate and to inspire investment, went to the small man, who was already struggling, and squeezed him by taxes and fees for licensing. I am proud today, on behalf of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, keeping faith with the people of Guyana, to come to the House to ask that these hardships be removed. By way of this Bill, we are reversing the hardships.

The truth is we would have been happy today to be coming to the House to enact legislation to move Guyana forward, but much of what we are doing today is correcting wrongs. It is almost like we have to clean the slate to make things normal again. Well, I do not know if horse carts can reverse, but the extent of the damage was done.

I believe that this is a good way for us to say to our Guyanese brothers and sisters, who toil day and night to make a living for their families and to take care of their households, that we apologise for the hardships they had to endure over the last five years. We, in the PPP/C, are not just saying we are sorry about your struggles, we are sorry about your plight and we understand your difficulty, we are doing tangible things to make life better for you. One of those tangible things that we are doing today is announcing and proposing the passage of this Bill. When it is passed, the huckster on foot, pedal cyclist, dray cart man, canter man and everyone will be smiling again in Guyana, thanks to the People’s Progressive Party/Civic.

The increase to \$62,500 to license hucksters not only led to tax evasion...because persons had to pay \$62,500 just for the licence, persons started to ‘duck’ from the Guyana Revenue Authority. It almost encouraged non-compliance and non-licensing. People who wanted to walk on the straight and narrow path and ensured that they were in keeping with what needed to be done, started to *duck and hide* because the fee

was too heavy. So, there was the problem of tax evasion and persons not getting the licence. People were finding it very hard to carry out their trade and to provide income for themselves and families. We are reducing this VAT to \$2,030, \$7,250 and \$36,350, moving it from the heavy \$62,500 and reversing it by 50%. That is the intent of this measure.

Section 3 of the Principal Act is amended by the substitution for the words beginning with, “every huckster” and ending with the word “sixty-two thousand, five hundred dollars”, to the following words:

“the man who is travelling on foot or with a man-propelled vehicle or cycle, he will only now have to pay, two thousand and thirty dollars, who travels with a horse cart or other beast bearing or drawing burden, seven thousand, two hundred and fifty dollars, and who travels with the motor vehicle, thirty-six thousand, three hundred and fifty dollars”.

This is bringing the prices down to a level of affordability, identifying with the sacrifices that our people make, encouraging small business people to continue to ply their trade, showing that we believe in micro and small enterprise development, showing that we understand our people and ensuring that they operate in a framework of affordability as well as compliance.

11.31 a.m.

Like my Friend, the Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs has said, I could have hardly imagined what it would have been like to stand here, today, in the presence of my Colleagues, who now represent APNU/AFC, to bring this Bill. It is because I would have had to remind them – and I am doing so, even in their absence, while reminding the nation – that we had appealed and asked them what they were doing that for. Why is it necessary? But they took the *might is right* approach and inflicted harm on the people of Guyana.

We went to the nation and one would have seen on the lamp posts the reversal of taxes and the reversal of value added tax (VAT). Today, this Bill is testimony to every Guyanese, including those who voted for the APNU/AFC, that when the PPP/C says something, they mean it and when we say that we are going to do something, we do it. Here it is, Bill No.4/2020 is making sure we take the burden off the backs of the small man. We are taking the burdens off the backs of the people who would make certain choices of how they would like to find their own niche in making a living in Guyana, and that is

being a huckster, whether on foot, bicycle, motorbike, dray cart, donkey cart, small or big canter; whether you are selling fruits, clothes, snow cone, *badam lacha* or jalebi.

I could imagine the excitement that is taking place in villages across this country. I grew in an environment that when we heard the man blow the shell, we knew it is the fish man passing. Carass and shrimp coming through. That man had to be subjected to Granger and cohorts over the last five years. That man can come out with his cart again and blow his shell. The man who is buying old batteries – they drive around and say, “buy old batteries” – had to go into hiding because he had to pay \$62,500 just because he had to have a licence to buy old batteries.

That is why I cannot accept this narrative from an uncaring Opposition that is trying to tell people that all the PPP/C is concerned about is the private sector. This Bill is dealing with ordinary people. It is getting village life going again. It is getting people real employment. When that man collects his money, he is going to push it in his pocket with pride and push his cart again and blow his whistle for the next street to come out and buy. The canter with the ‘greens’ could go back in the villages again. The donkey cart man selling broom, coconut, pumpkin and watermelon could go back again. This is because we are bringing in line, through affordability, compliance and ensuring that their welfare is taken care of and protected. We are a Government for the people and a Government with people in mind.

I ask that this Bill be supported. [*Applause*]

Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips]: Tuesday, 29th September, 2020 is the day of the small man and woman of Guyana. This is the day that the PPP/C has made and will deliver on the promises made to the people of Guyana. We campaigned through the length and breadth of Guyana, and today is the day of reversal, reduction, regrouping and re-positioning the people for prosperity in Guyana.

In keeping with our Government’s promise to the Guyanese people of putting more money in their pockets, we are reducing the cost of the hucksters’ licence by 50% of the burden that the former APNU/AFC Administration placed on the people.

From as early as 1st October, 2020, they would be able to benefit from the significant reduction of the cost of their licence fees. The former APNU/AFC Administration, which promised and preached about the ‘Good Life’ for all, thought that the increase of these license fees by 92% was a good

move in promoting their version of what a ‘Good Life’ is. This is just one of the many burdens that our PPP/C Government will make right for the people of Guyana.

The ordinary man trying to make an honest living, especially those with very small incomes on which they have to survive, could barely see any profits after all of the ways in which the previous Government found to take money out of poor people’s pockets. The ridiculous fees that these people were asked to pay, just for them to be able to operate their small businesses, were highly absurd. Our duty to the hundreds of thousands of Guyanese, who elected us to Office, is to improve their lives and help them to grow and develop.

By the reduction of these licence fees, these small businessmen and businesswomen would be able to do so much more and enjoy a better standard of living. Our Government is creating opportunities for our people to have more disposable income, thus increasing their spending power.

We are aware of the suffering of people all across this nation and, in urgently addressing these issues, it is critical that we make these changes as early as possible. The relief that would be brought to hucksters all across Guyana, by this Bill, is a testament to our Government’s commitment to delivering on our promises in our manifesto and creating the pathway to prosperity for all Guyanese.

Hucksters and *huckstering*, if there is such a word, is part of the Guyanese culture. It does not matter if you live in a low-income, a middle-income or a high-end community. As the Hon. Bishop Juan Edghill mentioned, all of us are accustomed to hearing the huckster whenever he or she enters our community. Many hucksters produce children who are engineers, doctors, lawyers, business executives and tycoons from that little income. Therefore, the reduction in taxes is very important for these small businesspeople to continue to develop Guyana and the future of Guyana.

Therefore, reversal, reduction and regrouping for prosperity for all the people of Guyana must start now and today is the day for the small man and woman of Guyana. Thank you.
[Applause]

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Clauses 1 and 2

Clauses 1 and 2 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported without amendments, read the third time and passed as printed.

(4) Income Tax (Amendment) Bill 2020

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Income Tax Act.”

[*Minister of Public Works*]

Bishop Edghill: I rise to move that the Income Tax (Amendment) Bill 2020 – Bill No.5/2020, published on 21st September, 2020, be now read a second time.

This Bill seeks to amend Section 20 (a)(1) of the Income Tax Act, Cap. 81:01, to provide for Mortgage Interest Relief (MIR). Homeowners will be allowed a deduction of interest paid on their mortgage loans where the loans do not exceed \$30 million. This Bill increases the loan for which deductions of interest are enjoyed from \$15 million to \$30 million, and shall come into effect from 1st January, 2020.

11.46 a.m.

Mortgage Interest Relief or interest incurred on housing loans up to \$30 million is to be deducted from your income tax. In 2013, the PPP/C introduced this measure, now known as the mortgage interest relief, to first time low-and middle-income homeowners so as to help them realise their dreams of becoming homeowners. This was intended to move our people from being tenants to becoming homeowners. This was intended to assist our young professionals to move from being in mommy’s and daddy’s home ‘shacked up’ to being families in units of their own. The intent, in 2013, was to ensure that a portion of the taxable income, utilised to pay increase on housing loans, be exempted from personal income tax. Initially, it was applicable to loans up to \$30 million.

In 2017, the APNU/AFC interfered, changed this and reduced it from \$30 million to \$15 million. What it was basically saying was that certain people should not live and enjoy certain benefits at a certain standard of living. It was the elitist thinking that caused APNU/AFC to reduce the price ceiling from \$30 million to \$15 million.

We stand here, today, to say to all of our professionals that whether they are in the public service or private service, Guyana must be a country that is expanding the middle class. Guyana must be a country that is making room for a growing middle class, and one of the things that middle class should see is homeownership. The low working class will benefit from this. Whether the loans are \$10 million, \$12 million, \$15 million or \$18 million, the low working class will benefit. But, we are taking it back to \$30 million, so that we would be able to allow this intervention to be a support to an emerging and developing, and, I dare say, young middle-class people who are owning their homes for the first time. This measure becomes more important because it coincides and it accompanies Government's overall vision of ensuring that, over the next five years, 50,000 house lots are distributed.

My colleagues in the Ministry of Housing and Water are tasked with the identification, development and putting in the infrastructure for these house lots. This is not about elections, where people hand out letters fooling people that they are getting a house lot and they end up with a cemetery. This is about real development. This measure is accompanying strategic reform in the Land Registry to ensure that people could get their titles for their lands. When one gets his or her title, one must be able to go to a financial institution – a bank – and present the title and obtain a loan for the building of one's home. When one has to start paying back the bank, one's Government, a working-class Government and a people's Government, is saying that, by way of this measure, one will get relief on one's income tax because of his or her mortgage payment.

This is something that is designed to stimulate homeownership. It will help the banks, even in their own portfolios of lending, because affordability in the repayment will allow them to have more applications and more people are going to make use of this facility. We are going to grow the middle-class, make homeownership affordable for the low-income earners and ensure that they benefit.

Let me give me you an example: let us say a potential homeowner takes out a mortgage of \$18 million with the terms of 30 years, at an interest rate of 9.5% and incurring a monthly interest of \$85,000 over the life of the loan. An individual earning a monthly income of \$150,000 can receive more than \$21,000 additional income at their disposal each month or more than \$250,000 each year, if they are a first-time homeowner with a mortgage of \$18 million. So, the non-taxable part of their income is there, and they have more

moneys available to them. We are talking about more disposal income.

Here again, we have to say that this is not something that is happening for the first time. The PPP/C, in 2013, put this measure in place. Today, with this Bill, we are correcting another wrong that was done to our people. It was wrong to reduce it to \$15 million. Today, with the passage of this Bill and with the support of this Assembly, we are correcting this wrong and we are putting it back to \$30 million. The net of people who will benefit from this measure will be widened and the benefits will be passed on to the ordinary people. More moneys will be put into people's pockets, ensuring more disposal income. I ask that this Bill be supported.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Let us have the Prime Minister speak and then we will take the suspension.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Speaker, again, our Government has promised that the burden of exorbitant taxes on our people will be reduced. This Bill, which will increase the mortgage interest relief ceiling for homeowners from \$15 million to \$30 million, will put hundreds of thousands of dollars back into the pockets of our people. This will be beneficial, especially for our young people, since they make up a large percentage of first-time homeowners.

Our Government believes that our people should be able to live in dignity. Excessive taxation and little incentive do not provide the environment for economic growth and improved standard of living. With this new implementation, the moneys which people will now be able to save could be used otherwise to improve their lives. For majority of the people, this means that they will have more money at their disposal to build and complete their homes in a faster time. This will also result in a higher standard of houses built by individuals as they will now have more moneys to actually put into the construction of their homes, instead of expending it on increase of a mortgage, which is already limited.

One of the major concerns of many people across this country is being able to afford to purchase or build a house. As we visit many communities across our country, people are frustrated about having lands on which they cannot afford to even lay a foundation and start construction. The demand for housing is enormous for persons at every single level and, thus, this measure is just one of the many ways in which our Government will address this situation and provide the

conditions necessary for our people to be able to achieve their goals and ambitions.

The APNU/AFC did nothing substantial during its five years in Office to address the issue of housing, nor did it provide the conditions to help to push our people forward. Instead, what the people got was the complete opposite of what they were promised. What our people were forced to live through and put up with was the grave incompetence of the Hon. Members who occupy the other side of this House. They were nothing but a complete failure of a Government to the people all across our country who trusted them. The APNU/AFC sat in Office for five whole years and could not even come up with a simple plan to attempt to do something, at least, to show that they had an ounce of concern for the plight of the ordinary man who was trying to make a better life. The benefits were just for the elite bunch and their cronies who lived lavish and luxurious lifestyles, like kings and queens, while the average man, many of whom are their own supporters, had to *feel the squeeze*.

This Bill will be deemed effective from 1st January, 2021. It will allow for the percentage of people who are able to afford a decent home to increase significantly. This increase in the mortgage interest relief also means that more persons will have easier access to mortgages for the purchase of homes which will result in a massive increase of homeownership across our country. This is what we call development. This is what progress means for the people of Guyana. This is what the PPP/C Government represents. This is another promise fulfilled. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this is a good time to take the suspension.

Sitting suspended at 12.00 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 1.22 p.m.

(5) Income Tax (Amendment) Bill 2020 – Bill No. 5/2020

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Income Tax Act.”

[Minister of Public Works]

Mr. Datadin: I rise to support the Income Tax Amendment Bill 2020 – Bill No. 5/2020. Before I start, I would like to echo the observation of the Hon. Attorney General and that is to say that the Opposition benches, today, are empty. The Members of the Opposition are absent from these

proceedings when they knew what was on the agenda. The whole world knew what was on the agenda for today, which is the removal of taxes that had been imposed under the last Administration. It was a chance for the Opposition Members to right the wrong they had done to the Guyanese people and they did not come. It was a chance to help the Guyanese people to make their lives easier and to make their burdens lighter. The Opposition Members chose that, today, they would not come to the House.

This amendment is an amendment to section 20 (A)(i) of the Principal Act. It provides what is commonly referred to as mortgage relief. It had come into being in 2013 under the PPP/C Administration and it was reduced, in 2017, under the last Administration. If we understand what mortgage relief is, we would understand why to have reduced it was such a terrible thing to do to the Guyanese people. This allows first-time homeowners to get some tax relief on the mortgage that they take. It also allows for a determination of what taxes they would pay on the borrowings.

When the bank lends someone money, there is an interest payment because that is how banks survives; that is the business of banking. The people who come to the banks to better their lives and to better the lives of their families could use every bit of help they could get. It is the Governments' place to help those people.

We heard so many comments from the Opposition benches last week saying that the Budget was a private sector budget. We have said repeatedly that this is a Budget for the people and all of Guyana. This demonstrates it. It is not only that we are saying it; our deeds reflect that this is what it is for. This is to assist and to benefit first-time homeowners who obtain a mortgage. The interest that is payable that attracted tax hitherto, the threshold is raised so that more could be borrowed and better facilities could be obtained by those people.

We must not forget that there is a knock-on effect in an economy when there is construction. We know that, under the last Administration, there was not much construction, simply because it did not give out many house lots. It goes *hand in glove*. As the Hon. Member, Minister Bishop Edghill, said, part of the programme of the Government is to give out more house lots. In giving out more house lots, one has to facilitate the house lot owners being able to build his or her house. This is to assist them to do that.

To reduce the number of houses that we construct is to reduce the amount of construction, which reduces the number of

persons who could earn a living from construction projects and it reduces the amount of construction materials that would be bought. It is a whole system – an ecosystem – that survives by itself but lifts a nation at the same time.

When we were on the campaign trail, we promised the people that one day it will get better. That we would reduce the taxes. Today is that day. All the tax increases, I dare say, that we are reducing today caused the Guyana economy to flounder; it slowed down. We also had mismanagement in Government, which only exaggerated that problem. This puts the transfer from the Government coffers to the people. The people of Guyana will have more money in their pockets to spend on what they choose to spend and on what is in their interest to spend. They do not have to be dependent. This is what governments should do; deliver for the people, deliver benefits to the people and make the peoples' lives better.

Respectfully, I support this Bill – the Income Tax Amendment Bill of 2020.

Mr. Nandlall: I rise to add my voice of support to the Bill that is before this honourable House. I recall, distinctly, in early 2013, when we met as a Government to consider budgetary measures. I recall, distinctly, the discussion of this particular measure. I recall it distinctly because it was the first time, in our tax architecture, that we were introducing, into our taxation system, such a progressive measure where reliefs were considered to be given to mortgages. It was quite a unique measure then and it remains a unique measure now. We implemented that in 2013 with resounding success. You note, Sir, that we did not start on a small threshold. We started at a ceiling limit of \$30 million. When the small man would be accessing a loan from the New Building Society Ltd., for example, where the limit was about \$12 million, we did not put the ceiling there, because it was not intended, only, to benefit the small house owner. We did not leave it at \$20 million either, an average of about US\$100,000. We took it all the way to \$30 million, as a first measure, to demonstrate the wide net that we intended to spread to encompass the widest cross-section of our population. That, by itself, demonstrates the vision of the People's Progressive Party/ Civic.

This measure was intended, also, to boost a housing drive which, in 2013, had galvanised into a construction boom, perhaps, the first or the highest of its kind seen in the Caribbean. It was during this boom, in the construction industry in our housing drive, that we saw the phenomenal proliferation of new homes by the hundreds in areas such as

Diamond, Eccles, Providence, Grove and Farm on the East Bank of Demerara; Wisroc and Amelias Ward in Region 10; La Parfaite Harmonie, Cornelia Ida, Stewartville, Met-en-Meerzorg and Tuschen in Region 3; Bath Settlement and Experiment in Region 5; and Hampshire, Tain and Williamsburg in Region 6, just to name a few. It was during this period of time that we lent that impetus and that stimulus to the housing drive and the construction industry.

It takes a special type of mentality to see such phenomenal progress, to see a people advancing at such a rate, to see housing schemes of the calibre and size of Diamond, which is the largest in the Caribbean, booming, and then to go and *nail a coffin* in such an industry. You have to be special to do such a thing.

That is exactly what Minister Jordan stood up, in 2017, in the National Assembly and did; chopped that \$30 million ceiling limit by half by reducing it to \$15 million. What he did was to take away the ambition of a large section of Guyanese. He took away the ambition, he took away the ability and the capacity of a large section of Guyanese, who we were specifically being targeted on this side – the young professional – denying their ability to possibly own a home. That singular policy does not stand by itself. It characterises a style of Government.

1.37 p.m.

Therefore, it is no surprise that the Hon. Members had to end up on that side of the House. It is not only because of this singular measure, but because it was part and parcel of some 200 measures in taxation and licensing fees that had a draconian effect on the disposable income and the lives and livelihoods of the people of this country. This they imposed in one singular electoral term. I do not think if one is to examine, since independence, the taxation policy of any country in the Caribbean, one will see a country that has imposed more taxes and licensing fees than the APNU/AFC during the 2015 to 2020 period. The APNU/AFC broke all records. We must examine what kind of philosophy, what kind of ideology and what kind of mentality would inform such an approach to Government and such a style of governance.

It is an ideology that sees taxation as the only source of revenue to finance government. It is a style of government that offers no incentives to the productive sector. There were no incentives to attract investments and augment trade. There were no policies to create jobs. There was the shutting down

of industries that were encountering problems rather than the nourishing of those industries back to good health.

It is a style of government that kills economic growth, stifles productivity and stymies commerce and trade, which results in not only a contraction of the economy but makes it almost reliant, solely, on taxation as a source of revenue. It is this style of governance, practised by the APNU/AFC, which saw vast reduction in exports. There was no foreign exchange. There were joblessness and reduction in imports because of a lack of money flowing in the economy and less revenue in customs duties and import taxes. In the process, 30,000 persons lost their jobs, Barama Company Limited and such operations closed, BaiShanLin was chased out of the country and the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) was shut down with no new markets found for sugar. That is the economy that the APNU/AFC created. That is why, with no other economic-financing-generation activity taking place in the country – I see Mr. Statia here – they kept calling on Mr. Statia, the Commissioner General of the Guyana Revenue Authority, to say that the GRA was falling short on revenues. When he told them that there were no imports and asked from where they wanted him to get the customs duties, they told him to start a new process at the Customs and Trade Administration Department, which was the 100% examination so that tax and duty could be placed on every single item. When that failed, the APNU/AFC had to come back to this House to impose the 200 draconian measures on the backs of the Guyanese people to keep the Government going.

The Government's approach to job creation in the productive sector can easily be gleaned from statements made by the President himself. He said that the Government was not in the business of creating jobs. He told rice farmers, at this very venue, at a National Rice Industry Conference that he held, that rice is not the Government's business. He told our university graduates, who asked him about jobs, that it was not the Government's business and that they could go to the Stabroek Market and sell cook-up rice with fried fish and plantain chips.

Mr. Carl Greenidge, a trained Economist, told us, in 2014 in the National Assembly, that GuySuCo is a black hole. The GuySuCo was the largest employer of Guyanese in Guyana. That was how the APNU/AFC saw employment and that is how it saw the productive sector.

This Income Tax (Amendment) Bill 2020 – Bill No. 5/2020 and the many other measures that are being laid before us and

are being discussed today, display, on the contrary and in contrast, our style of Government where we are not only pursuing an aggressive housing policy. When we speak about housing, no one can accuse us of bluffing because our housing drive is unprecedented in the English-speaking Caribbean where we distributed over 120,000 house lots from 1992 to 2015. The President himself said that we are going to distribute 10,000 next year.

Quite apart from the housing drive, we are also making it easier for the people to get mortgages and relief from interest in relation to those mortgages. The increase in non-taxable mortgage relief saves the homeowner between \$5 million to \$7.5 million on an average, depending, of course, on the loan amount. On average, over 50% of the first set of mortgaging payments are to service the interest of a loan. This measure grants relief against that interest.

There is yet another dimension. My Learned Friend and the Hon. Member, Mr. Datadin, spoke about the spinoffs that take place when one starts a house. First of all, quite apart from the Government laying the foundation such as the drainage, road, irrigation, light and water, billions of dollars are being expended.

When one comes to the individual whose house is being built, first of all, there is a contractor along with about eight persons who will begin the project. That is eight families immediately securing jobs and, depending on the size of the house, those jobs are secured for the next 10 months on an average, if not beyond a year. Then the work begins, and truckloads of sand have to come. From one truckload of sand, there is a driver, a porter and the owner of the sandpit; that is three families earning from that one truckload of sand. The foundation is then created and one moves from that. Every single thing has to be purchased. Just take one house and the economic activities it creates and multiply it 10,000 times over to see the type of economic stimulation which will take place in our country. That is just on the construction side.

Then, of course, there is the banking side. Just before we got into Government, because of the state of the economy, the rate of bad loans at the banks was at some 40%. That sector needs a stimulant. This can provide it with that stimulant. The banking sector is an important sector in our country and here it is, with this measure, that sector will also benefit. There is no reason why this Bill should not be commended to this House and be supported unanimously.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, we again have two clauses in this Income Tax (Amendment) 2020 – Bill No. 5/2020, and I propose that we take both of these clauses together.

Question put and agreed to.

Clauses 1 and 2

Clauses 1 and 2 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Bill considered and approved.

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported without amendments, read the third time and passed as printed.

(6) Intoxicating Liquor Licensing (Amendment) Bill 2020 – Bill No. 6 of 2020

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Intoxicating Liquor Licensing Act.”

[*Minister of Public Works*]

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Speaker, I rise to request that this Bill be withdrawn. Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Sir.

Bill withdrawn.

(7) Miscellaneous Licences (Amendment) Bill 2020 – Bill No. 7 of 2020

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Miscellaneous Licences Act.”

[*Minister of Public Works*]

1.52 p.m.

Bishop Edghill: I rise to move that the Miscellaneous Licences (Amendment) Bill 2020 – Bill No. 7/2020, published on 21st September, 2020, be now read a second time.

This Bill seeks to amend section 6 of the Miscellaneous Licences Act by reducing the prescribed fee for a copy of a lost licence by 50% of the previous increased amount. We are asking that this amendment take effect from 1st October, 2020.

We had a situation where a licence that was lost, once a person is seeking to get another copy, the fees ranged between 100% to 500%. This was among the hundreds of fees imposed in the last five years of the previous Administration on all licensing fees and charges. This was another burdensome measure that was borne by the ordinary man. Here again, we are correcting another wrong, keeping faith with the people of Guyana and fulfilling our manifesto promises about the reversal of all the hardship measures.

Section 6 of the Principal Act is amended by the substitution of the words: “one thousand five hundred dollars”, for the words: “eight hundred and fifty dollars.” All of us, for good reasons and sometimes unknown reasons, have had documents misplaced. In some instances, they are not even misplaced but just cannot be found at the time when we are looking for them and when they need to be used and we need to get copies to get on with our lives. Even that was used as an opportunity to garner revenue for a visionless Government that lacked the capacity to dream and to bring investment to Guyana and so to grow the economy.

When they implemented these measures, they were drilling further and deeper into the pockets and purses of the Guyanese people. There is a favourite line that is going around these days: “I want to breathe”. Well, these enactments, today, are to make the Guyanese people breathe. They could have a sigh of relief. Their pockets do not have to hurt. This measure, as simple as it is, provides for them when misfortune falls, whether it is by way of getting wet in the rain, documents being damaged, handbags stolen by robbers in the streets or just documents being misplaced. When they go to get them renewed, they do not have to be overly penalised, but by paying a moderate fee, ensuring cost recovery and not profit making. Cost recovery is what we are talking about; profit making is what the A Partnership For National Unity/Alliance For Change was seeking to do.

So, we are asking that this be amended to allow a simple process, of cost recovery and affordability to the ordinary man, giving them a chance to breathe. I ask that this be supported by the House, so that we could get on with the people’s business and so that Guyana could breathe again.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Bill considered and approved.

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported without amendments, read the third time and passed.

(8) Tax (Amendment) Bill 2020 – Bill No. 8/2020

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Tax Act.

[*Minister of Public Works*]

Bishop Edghill: I rise to move that the Tax (Amendment) Bill 2020 – Bill No. 8/2020, published on 21st September, 2020, be now read a second time.

Mr. Speaker and Colleagues, this Bill, with all of the various clauses, is basically seeking to reverse, by way of reducing the prescribed licence fees by 50% of the previously increased amounts, with the exception of the licence fee, payable under section 46 of the Principal Act, which was increased to reflect 50% of the previous increased licence fee implemented. They shall come into operation on 1st October, 2020.

As previously outlined, the increase in these fees that were imposed in that era of visionless leadership...I was trying to get correct parliamentary language, Sir. These fees were increased from 100% to 500% and were amongst the hundreds of fees imposed by the previous Administration in the last five years. These were very burdensome to the ordinary man. In keeping with our People’s Progressive Party/Civic manifesto to redress these wrongs, they have now been reduced.

The fees are over 100 in number and they are outlined in the Bill. Whatever was the increase, we are reducing it by 50%. If you go through the Bill, clause by clause, in section 4 (2), we are going to be substituting the words “fifty thousand” with the words “thirty-five thousand”. In section 6 (2), we will be substituting the words “thirty thousand” with the words “twenty-one thousand, six hundred”. This is because, whatever was the increase that was added, we are reducing it by 50% of that increase.

Section 8 (3), where there are the words “three million”, they will be to be substituted now with “two million, five hundred thousand” – reductions. Section 9 (2), where there are the words “three million” they will be substituted with the words “two million, five hundred thousand”. Section 17 (2), the words “one hundred thousand” would be substituted with the words “seventy thousand”.

Every time I read a section, you are discussing moneys going back to the ordinary man and people having moneys in their hands to look after themselves.

In section 18 (1), the numbers are there. The reductions are being made in keeping with the 50% formula of reduction. In section 19, we are substituting the words “four thousand” and “two thousand” with the words “three thousand, two hundred” and “one thousand, six hundred”, respectively - again, reflecting significant decreases. Section 20 continues with the same manner of reduction. Section 21, for the words “ten thousand”, we are substituting “five thousand” – 50%. I am sure that Guyanese listening to this are smiling because everything is being cut in half.

2.07 p.m.

Do you know what it is to have a government that is reducing fees and charges? That is a government that cares about the people. That is a government that wants to see people do well. We are not a Government that punishes people because they make money; we create an enabling environment for them to make more money. We are not a Government that sees people prospering and think that we have to get more taxes from them. We see people prospering and we create an environment for them to be able to prosper more and to employ more people so that there could be more people employed and engaged. We are taking the necessary steps.

In section 22, we are substituting the words, “five thousand” and “one thousand five hundred,” with the words “four thousand” and “one thousand, one hundred and twenty-five”, respectively, significantly reducing it. Like I told you in my preamble, there are more than 100 such fees that are being reduced. This Bill comprehensively, clause by clause and section by section, articulates a common position. Wherever the fees were increased during the APNU/AFC era, we are now cutting and reducing that by 50% of the increase. This means that, when one goes to do business, whatever the fees or licence were that one had to pay, under the PPP/C one will be paying significantly less. That is what your Government, the PPP/C Government, is doing for the people of Guyana.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that this Bill be supported by this honourable House and let us get on with getting people the benefits they deserve. Let us get Guyana moving again.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

Mr. Indar: This particular Bill, Bill No.8/2020, the Tax (Amendment) Bill, has long wide-ranging effects. What this Bill sets out to do is reverse fees that were imposed as hardship measures by the APNU/AFC Government over the last five years. In my presentation, during the budget period, I said that, in 2014, under the last PPP/C Government, Guyana collected tax revenues of \$135 billion only. As of 2019, the last year that was reported under the APNU/AFC Government – just four short years – the APNU/AFC Government brought in \$226 billion into the Government coffers. Ninety-one billion more in revenues was taken from household citizenry and brought into Government coffers. What that has done is pauperise Guyanese. What this Bill intends to do is reverse some of those measures.

I will go to some of the measures that they put in, which had effects on Guyanese, and which literally took moneys out of their pockets. The first one is that this Bill reduces the fees for persons selling water – aerated and mineral water. It reduces the fees for operation of a video rental store and for an insurance company selling accident, fire and life insurance.

What this Bill does is reduce the fees for trade licences: trade licences in Georgetown, Linden, and New Amsterdam; in the Stabroek Market and in other markets – in the Linden market, in the New Amsterdam Market, in the village council markets, and in the local government markets. This Bill reduces the fees for persons operating in those markets to pay less. We are reducing the fees that they increased by cutting them by half. We have put this in place within the first month and a half in Government. This Bill reduces the fees for licences in all rural districts. For one to operate in those markets, one had to pay high fees, but this Bill reduces that. When buying drugs to take to your family, when they are sick and so on ... If someone is getting a headache or belly ache... This Bill reduces the Druggist Licence, the fees to operate a drug store.

This Bill reduces the Butcher Shop Licence. Imagine, Butcher Shops Licences are what were increased under the previous Government, but this Bill reduces them.

I move forward. Regarding the cigarette factory, this Bill reduces the fee to operate it. When one goes around the city

and the country, one sees men having a little cart or a little stand selling their cigarettes and to plying their trade. The fees were increased over the last five years. This Bill reduces the fees for them to operate. This Bill reduces Pawn Shop Brokerage Licence. The money changers, for them to carry on that trade, their fees were increased over the last five years. This Bill cuts those fees by half.

I move on to craft. Anything related to craft that one was operating, one had to pay a fee. This Bill reduces that.

I move on. When Jesus Christ went into Jerusalem, he went on an ass. He was carried on an ass into Jerusalem. They taxed that. If that trade was carried on now it would have been taxed. People are drawn by asses, horse carts and animals, and they taxed that. This Bill reduces the taxes for people who carry on trade with donkeys, mules and ponies.

I move on. If one carried on a 'ball' or a 'dance' and one had to pay a fee or a licence, this Bill reduces it. This Bill continues to reduce fees for persons operating on a cinema. If one wanted to take his or her family to the cinema, one had to pay a heavy licence fee for it. This Bill reduces that fee.

For petroleum pumps, they had increased the fees. This Bill seeks to reduce those fees. The Hon. Member mentioned the Huckster's Licence, man-propelled beasts, beasts of burden, and motor Hucksters' Licence. The previous Bill reduced those fees. That is in addition to this Bill, which continues to reduce fees in the Auctioneers' Licence. In rice factories with milling capacity – if you have a rice factory with milling capacity – this Bill reduces the fees.

There is a long list of fees that this Bill seeks to reduce. These fees were placed on all aspects of society over the last five years – on every man. As the Hon. Member said, if one was selling *Badam Lacha*, they tried to tax him/her. They taxed everything under the sun. A fee imposed by a Government is similar to a tax; one cannot get away from it. For one to go about doing his or her business to make money to take care of his or her family, one has to operate in a legal way. This Bill reduces all of the hardship measures that the APNU/AFC Government put in place, which persons in the private sector were crying about for the past five years.

I ask the House to support this Bill. This Bill is a promise made in the manifesto by the Hon. Irfaan Ali when he was campaigning. We told the people, when we went around the country, that we would reverse these hardship measures. Today, this is on the floor for consideration and I ask the House to consider and pass this Bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

Mr. Datadin: As the Hon. Minister within the Ministry of Public Works just said, this Bill reverses taxes and duties payable in so many areas. It seeks to amend the Tax Act. Contained in that would be the fees and licence fees payable on nearly every aspect of business in society. This particular Bill and the amendment will have the greatest effect, and the reductions will be most felt or the beneficiaries of the reductions will be mostly in the small businesses, such as: in the markets, the persons who have shops, and the persons who have establishments such as butcher shops. There is where the benefit will be mostly felt.

We know that Guyana and the world are experiencing a pandemic and we know that the driving force of every economy in the world is the small businesses. The little neighbourhood businesses provide employment. In most cases, they provide cheaper goods, because it is usually locally sourced. Those persons, under the last Administration, were made to suffer a tremendous increase in areas that are as diverse as film distribution, video distribution and betting shops.

In every aspect of business, the markets within the cities, within the rural areas and the local area authorities, all of those things, we all know... For everyone who has a stall in the market, whether it is in Georgetown or outside of Georgetown, there are fees that are attached because services have to be provided. If you make those fees prohibitive, if you make those fees so high that for small businesses to succeed they cannot afford it or they are struggling to afford it, what you are doing is taking a viable working entity, a man who is working to support his family, and making him unable to do so. When he is unable to do that, then one is not only affecting that one man, but one is affecting an entire family. In many cases, in the rural areas, extended families are affected – employment is affected.

If we could just look at some of the fees that are involved, it involves markets, persons – as the Learned Minister said – Butcher Shop, Pawn Shop Brokers and Money Lenders' Licences, bonded warehouses, and even vessels. These are small vessels that are used to transport in the riverain areas and in a lot of the areas within the interior, where transportation is easier by boat than it is by land. Those small boats that are used, whether they are used to transport persons or cargo, have to be licensed. The fees that were imposed made that more expensive. These fees are now being reduced by half.

The licences for vehicles, especially vehicles that are used to trade – that would be under section 35 of the Principal Act – are common in the city and are more prevalent in the rural areas, where animals are also used to transport goods, in addition to vehicles that are used to transport goods. What happened under the last Administration was that it became more expensive for the person who owned that transport to obtain a licence.

2.22 p.m.

We all know that, in the rural areas, it is difficult for persons to afford all of these, and even an imposition, an increase of a few thousand dollars, would be prohibitive in them obtaining a licence. As the Hon. Minister Edghill said, there are more than 100 reductions in taxes contained within the Tax (Amendment) Bill 2020 - Bill No. 8 of 2020. More than 100 taxes will be reduced which include, the reduction on transportation – vehicles, boats and animal drawn carts – which are essential to many people. We go back to the promise that there will be more house lots distributed and the promise that mortgage payments, when one is building his/her first house, will be reduced. One still has to transport the goods and the building materials from wherever one purchased them, to wherever the location is that he/she is engaged in construction. This brings all of that together because, not only is it now cheaper for the person, in terms of the burdens he has in what he will have to do, the benefits he will get, once he gets a house lot and the benefits, he will get from the mortgage interest relief, but he would also enjoy cheaper transportation costs, to be able to transport the building materials that he would use. This provides for such relief.

Money Lenders & Pawn Shop Licences, which are usually of assistance and of even greater assistance to the lower end or the poorer members of our society who use these facilities to be able to manage and finance their everyday lives, they were making that, under the last Administration, a more expensive proposition. This is because if the money lender and the pawn broker have to pay more money to obtain his licence, certainly the fees he would charge and the fees that would be imposed upon his customers would be higher. This takes a step, a giant leap forward, to reducing the fees, making those services more affordable, opening up to persons who need those services, and giving the people the opportunity of being able to obtain those services.

Included in the reductions are Hotel Licences, Restaurant Licences and even licences for Members Clubs and for

persons who would get temporary licences for entertainment. There are some events which require a temporary licence for the evening; those fees will be reduced. The licence on billiard tables – can you imagine, even the licence on every pool table or billiard table, a common form of recreation, was increased? That too would be reduced. The occasional Liquor and Tobacco Licence for fairs or events like those which have to be licenced, will also be reduced.

For restaurants that have to be licenced, those fees would also be reduced. Licences for shops, whether grocery shops or shops that sell cigarettes and malt liquor, or Off-Liquor Licence would be reduced. It would mean, therefore, that, as an across-the-board general proposition, the cost of the small businesses remaining in operation and being engaged in the process of providing services to the communities in which they are from, should be less. This would mean that, in those communities, those persons in the communities should benefit from it.

I ask this House to join me in supporting this Bill in full. Thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Nandlall: As the two previous speakers have indicated, this Bill encompasses a series of reductions done to a long list of licences and fees, during that era of taxation mania or *taxamania* under the APNU/AFC.

I recall sitting in the House when these increases were being imposed. I am sure, like many of my Colleagues then, we learnt of some of these licences. We did not even know that they existed. Since I was growing up in the countryside, I have seen a butcher shop at the side of the street and I never knew that the gentleman needed a licence. I learnt about that when those Bills were passed and when the increases were imposed. Sir, again it reflects on the style of Government. I do not know how much revenue those increases may have amassed.

As politicians and as administrators, one weighs on one side, the benefits of measures against their detriment. So, I do not know. Perhaps, I will ask the Commissioner-General someday to total for me, for one year, how much increase in revenue those miscellanies of measures amassed, and then weigh that against the burden that it imposed upon so many thousands of Guyanese. I am sure if that was done, these measures would not have been implemented. They learnt; they are on the other side. So, governments all over the world should take a lesson about imposing taxes on a population or increasing fees they did not even know exist on the

population and causing them to go and pay it. I do not know what the policy was because no one was exempt.

When you look at this Bill and you look at the previous Bills, and I believe there are still some to come, taxes are in every single sector and every single economic activity. Somebody had to sit studiously and go through all these licences. They were so anxious to tax that they taxed animals that did not exist. A mule, I understand is an extinct animal. We do not have bullock carts anymore. They taxed that.

I really do not understand what the thinking was behind the policy. The bottom line is that they caused untold sufferings on a large section of our population. I do not know how many people paid them when they were imposed. Again, I may have to ask the Commissioner-General for assistance. I remember the raucous, the apprehension, the anger, the stress and the emotional outcry which resonated across this land when these fees were imposed. I do not think we have the mechanism to enforce the non-compliance of it. We made a promise to the people of our country, during the elections campaign, that we will reverse, as far as possible, these measures and/or we will reduce them by half, and we are delivering on this promise today.

Like the other speakers who spoke, I want to emphasise that there is no one special set of people in our country who are affected. In this Bill alone, it stretches across the entire spectrum because there is a cinema distributor which has to be a large business; the hotels which are large businesses; the man who pulls the donkey cart or drives the donkey cart. It is right across that spectrum of the country. Everyone was touched by those measures and would have been affected by their imposition.

When the Opposition says that this is a private sector Budget, it is absolute nonsense. I heard Mr. Forde, when he spoke in his budgetary presentation, criticise us for reversing the licences and reversing these tax measures. Imagine they are criticising us. It is sad for our country because, as I said, they are still parliamentarians, and they represent a significant and an important segment of our country. It shows how out of sync and out of touch they are with reality. Any politician who walks this country and goes into the villages, the *backdam*, the rice fields, the Amerindian communities and speak to the people, they would know what hardships people are facing. Anything or any measure that will minimise or reduce that hardship, a politician, or rather a sensible politician, would want to support it. You have a set of people on that side, in their budgetary presentations, who criticised

these measures, calling them private sector measures. It shows, again, that there is one set of people in this Assembly who will have to carry the developmental agenda of this country forward and that is shown here today because we are alone. That is shown here today.

We are undaunted, but we will continue to deliver our promises to the people of Guyana. In this Bill that is before the House, there is one set of those promises which we are delivering today. I thank you very much. *[Applause]*

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

2.37. p.m.

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, again, we have two clauses, albeit a long table. I, nevertheless, put the question that we take both clauses together. Those in favour say, “aye”. Those against, say, “no”. The ayes have it.

Clauses 1 and 2

Clauses 1 and 2 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported without amendments, read the third time and passed.

(9) Value-Added Tax (Amendment) Bill 2020

A BILL intituled:

“An Act to amend the Value-Added Tax Act.”

[Minister of Public Works]

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Speaker, I rise to move that the Value-Added Tax (Amendment) Bill 2020, Bill No. 9/2020, published on 21st September, 2020, be now read a second time.

This Bill seeks to amend the Value-Added Tax (VAT) Act, Chapter 81:05, thereby reversing the imposition of VAT on exports. The Bill also allows our exporters to be registered for VAT and to reclaim input-purchase VAT on moneys

expended on cost in pursuance of production with the effective date, 1st October, 2020.

This is a significant intervention that is being made by this Administration and it is expected to put moneys, real value, back in the hands of people. Just for the last quarter of this year, this could cost about \$630 million.

The measure to place exporters in the exempt category, rather than the current zero-rated category, alleviates the burden of absorbing the input VAT paid on cost component relevant to the production of the export product. Currently, what obtains is this: because exporters, such as those in the fishing, rice and timber industries, among others, are in the exempt category and cannot be registered for VAT, they cannot reclaim input-purchase VAT on moneys expended on cost in pursuance of production. This piece of legislation seeks to correct that. This Administration intends to bring about change by providing immediate support to and stimulus for our manufacturing sector and our exporters.

We have been making the point that, even in an oil and gas economy, we have to support our traditional sectors. We do not want to have a situation where our manufacturers, agro-processors, those involved in fishery...Perhaps at some stage, we may become exporters of poultry and beef on a large scale, especially with the interventions being made in *Budget 2020*, where we are seeking to incentivise plantation agriculture for corn and soya. People must be able, when they are doing business, to have a playing field. If they have to expend in the input of production, they should be able to reclaim VAT at the appropriate time. This measure will result in a reduction in the cost of manufacturing. It will make us more competitive and it will make manufacturing more profitable, thus encouraging more people to enter the market. We want to see expansion across the various sectors. We know that the private sector, including the manufacturing sector, is a key area for job creation.

On this particular initiative, I can simply say that we offer no apology for stimulating the private sector. We offer no apology. It is because the jobs that we are talking about, we have to be able to see the private sector grow so that our young people could be employed and there could be real jobs from which people can earn significant sums. Manufacturing presents such an opportunity.

The removal of this burdensome VAT on exports and the reclassification that we are talking about would allow for competition, profitability and expansion in the manufacturing sector. I can give an example. Suppose an exporter of

manufactured items exports \$5 million worth of goods, and these cost about \$4 million to produce. Let us assume that \$1 million worth was non-labour input that included 14% VAT. Under the previous Administration, this manufacturer would not have been able to claim, as refund, the VAT paid on those inputs. In this example, this would amount to almost \$370,000 in unrecoverable costs to this small manufacturer. I dealt with a shipment of \$5 million worth of export, whatever is being produced, and not the big hundreds of millions and billion-dollar companies. It is a small scale – \$5 million. The gentleman, the lady or that microenterprise can recover \$370,000, as a result of the removal of VAT on exports and the reclassification.

One must understand this in an environment of growing small businesses. Our Government's approach is not just planting to eat. We are an agricultural society. With the building of the Takutu Bridge at Region 9, connecting Lethem and Brazil, and the dream of a Linden to Lethem road, which is being catered for, in the first instance, from Linden to Mabura, our people must be able to export produce into South America. So, the man from Parika, Hubu or Ruby or the manufacturer of furniture, who is taking our wood and making beds and chairs, must be able to load his canter and export products into the South American market. He must be able to benefit from this measure. Whether it is fish, vegetables or peppers that have to be packaged, and all the other things that take place, we are creating an environment to encourage manufacturing, agro-processing, development and growth of our export market. Of course, Mr. Speaker, you are fully aware that the more we export, the more foreign currency becomes available to us as a country and that rebounds to our benefit.

This simple measure, carefully crafted and carefully thought out in consultation with the people who were engaged, has now created a new environment and a new playing field to ensure that our manufacturers can grow, compete and be able to reclaim VAT because we are removing VAT on exports and we are reclassifying this arrangement.

I ask that all my Hon. Members in this House support this Bill because this is a support for Guyana's development; it is a support for job creation; it is a support for strengthening manufacturing; and it is a support for the expansion of our economy.

2.52 p.m.

I do not know how my Colleagues, who should have been sitting on the opposite side, but who have absented

themselves today, would have responded to this. I guess that is one of the reasons they are not here. They would have had to tell Guyana why they are not supporting microenterprise development and export-oriented growth.

My Colleague in the Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce, in her budget and in her budget presentation, told us about the development of areas for manufacturing, parks and schemes to encourage that kind of production.

Our plan to bring hydroelectricity, to ensure that we have cheap reliable and renewable electricity, is to encourage cheaper manufacturing and agro-processing. Our plan to bring gas on shore to fuel generators to give us cheaper electricity is tied into this initiative.

Even though we do not want to talk about it, our plan for the expansion of the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA), with a longer runway, is to ensure that we have the capacity for the bigger jets to reduce the cost of freight and to aid export of even non-traditional crops. Our pumpkins, boulders, peppers, plantain and tomatoes must get to destinations, without destruction and under the right conditions so as to ensure that they could enter into markets.

We are creating an environment, not just for the pak choy at Bourda Market, the pumpkin at Parika Market or the man making a bed for the village, but we are creating an environment that those same people, who are involved in those small businesses, could grow and develop. This is so that manufacturing could become profitable and competitive, and they could be able to reap the benefits when engaged.

I ask for the support of this august House in supporting this measure. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Seeraj: Mr. Speaker, on the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) Radio, there is a programme called *Your Morning Cup*. Obviously, it comes over in the mornings. On 12th June, the then incoming Chairman of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Hon. Ralph Gonsalves, was a guest on this programme. He was asked about matters pertaining to Guyana's elections. He said a number of things but the one which stood out and stayed with me was *take your licks like a man*.

I look across there and I do not see anyone to take the licks. I know the Hon. Member, Mr. Shuman, is with us virtually. He is being represented by his staff.

I join with my Colleagues in stating that this Opposition is ashamed and that is why they stayed away. It is either that or

they are not certain how the voting will go, given what took place recently – I think it was yesterday – at the Regional Democratic Council's (RDC's) voting for a Chairperson and a Deputy Chairperson in Region 4, where the whole *baby party broke up*. It may be one or two reasons or a combination of them.

Like the Hon. Minister, if one is talking about giving back to the people, very few can argue against it. The tax man might not agree because he wants to collect as much revenue as possible. Measures that the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) placed in this Budget can be likened to that of planting a seed, where one provides the necessary nutrients, nurtures that plant and then harvests it. These measures are intended to, first of all, arrest the decline in our economy and give incentives for expansion in growth and productivity. Then, the tax man will be happy. It is making an investment in our country and in our economy, where we are giving these breaks to stimulate the economy to make more in the long run.

The A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC), of course, does not understand this. Like the Hon. Nandlall said, they were not clear about what they were taxing or how to go about taxing what they did not know they were taxing – for example, the mules and bullocks.

My attention was drawn to a presentation by the then Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan. On 10th January, 2018, there was a debate on the Value-Added Tax (Amendment) Bill, Bill No. 2 of 2017. This is what the then Hon. Minister said and it gives an indication of how, in their desperation, they were trying to go about garnering as much revenue as possible, in the absence of attracting investment that would have given real growth and garnered more tax for the Government.

The Hon. Minister said:

“I want to say immediately that this Bill has nothing to do with any new measure, *per se*, and that most of these amendments in this Bill are really consequent to the amendments that were made to the Value Added Tax (VAT) Act and Schedules in Budget 2017. Let me allay any fears that I did not talk about this in my speech, and that we were now introducing measures that seem to be a burden on either the consumer or other stakeholders.”

I would describe this statement as *a sleight of hand* by the then Minister because he knew fully well what would have

been the impact of these measures on our economy. We saw it happening all over. I recall that one of the Hon. Members, I think it was Mr. Holder, in his Budget presentation, spoke about record breaking production in rice under the APNU/AFC Administration. I said that, in 2015, there was record-breaking production but, by 2019, they had produced less than what they had produced in 2015. It shows clearly that the measures they put in place...unlike what happened under the PPP/C, where, from 2009 up to 2014, every year was a record-breaking year. The APNU/AFC received a solid platform for growth and expansion and they destroyed it with measures of taxation. Of course, there was mismanagement, incompetence and all of that.

The burden of taxes on the productive sector destroyed our productive sector and, of course, consequences followed. That point was made to show clearly that they might have reached record production, but because they did not sustain the sector or all the sectors, because they did not sustain the economy with broad based fiscal policy or macroeconomic policy, the economy faltered and ground to a halt. Then, the country suffered, and a *knee jerk* reaction was to tax the people more. They added over 200 taxes, they taxed the people more, revenue went up and the sector that was supposed to produce and generate wealth continued to shrink.

Coming out of World War II, the worst military conflict in the world in our history, where about 70 to 80 million people died in war-ravaged Europe, Finance Ministers around the world were trying to build back their economies. One could understand that they were coming out of a situation where their sectors had been totally destroyed and infrastructure and all of that had been bombed in oblivion. They were trying to garner taxes to stimulate their economies. Sir Winston Churchill had this to say at that time:

“I contend that for a nation to try to tax itself into prosperity is like a man standing in a bucket and trying to lift himself up by the handle”.

A country cannot get prosperity by taxation. What the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government is doing is putting into place measures that might reduce taxes for now, but that are intended to generate more revenue in the future because of expansion in production and productivity, manufacturing and servicing and all of that. This move that is being made here, through Bill No. 9 of 2020, the Value-Added Tax (Amendment) Bill 2020, is a move in the right direction. It is in keeping with measures outlined in *Budget 2020* and measures that are outlined in our 'plan for

prosperity'. This is how to bring about interest, investment and expansion in the sectors that will ensure the economy grows and booms.

I want to close by commending Bill No. 9 of 2020 – the Value-Added Tax (Amendment) Bill 2020 – to this honourable House and I know that it will be passed unanimously. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Bill considered and approved.

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported without amendments, read the third time and passed.

3.07 p.m.

(10) Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill 2020

A BILL intituled:

An Act to amend the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act.

[*Minister of Home Affairs*]

Minister of Home Affairs [Mr. Benn]: I rise to move that the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill 2020 – Bill No. 10 of 2020, published on 21st September, 2020, be now read a second time.

The amendments to this Bill are contained in the Explanatory Memorandum and they seek to amend the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, Chapter 51:02, to provide for exemptions from the requirement to register and pay licence fees for excavators, bulldozers and other vehicles used in the mining industry.

I think, in a broad sense and bearing in mind all that has gone before in this honourable House today in regard to the Bills, the Acts passed and the affirmations done, in regard to the work of this honourable House, on one part, it is sad that we have to do these things today. It is highly unfortunate that, after five years of a Government of Guyana, we have to come here to restart the reel and to restart the effort to bring Guyana's economy back onto solid footings.

We in the PPP/C, having been dislocated from the job that we were supposed to be doing all of the time, have to come back, again, to restart Guyana on its development path. I have to say that we are in this position because of the misguided work and the derailing of our development agenda and programme by the APNU/AFC Government, which preceded us in this House. Five wasted years are what we have to acknowledge here today and what we have to try to make up for in a fairly short space of time.

If we take away the investments that have been made in regard to oil, if we look at the attacks on the agricultural, rice, sugar, timber and mining industries, we have to acknowledge that our economy has been devastated, and it has been devastated largely by regressive taxation policies by the APNU/AFC. They might think there is no shame in it, but they are not here today. They are not here so that *our eyes could make four* and we can look across at them. They have not gone to look into the eyes of the children of the sugar industry workers, the bauxite workers on the Berbice River, at Kwakwani, Linden or Demerara and in all the communities that suffered during their period in Government.

There were regressive taxation policies. The one to which this Bill refers relates to something which did not exist before they went into Government. They put it in place. It did not exist before. If one talks to some of the miners in the interior – I have worked a long time in the interior – they would tell you that they have been going there for 30 years and they have been seeing the same mora tree which has been there, since they went there the first time. It is a hard place to develop under difficult circumstances and every effort has to be made to support these industries, particularly the mining industry, but also the others.

The imposition of this tax measure by the APNU/AFC in their time was unkind, malignant and unnecessary. It, along with the other measures it took, led to conditions so that even while the price of gold was going up – and it is now at the highest levels for several years – the operators could not have taken advantage of the opportunities which presented themselves as a result of the increases in the price of gold. The increases in the price of gold and the increases in production, which we see, have come from the larger operators, the big companies, overall. Our medium and small-scale miners and operators could not take advantage because higher costs and higher inputs were placed on them.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Indar, spoke here before about Jesus Christ going to Jerusalem on a donkey, on an ass. Not being

very religious myself, but knowing at least this one, Jesus Christ is supposed to have said:

“Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's...”

But, apparently, the ‘Caesars’ we had were malignant and irresponsible. When they got into Government, they adapted a lifestyle, an arrogance and a dissolute lifestyle, in regard to the way they presented themselves to the people, which did not engender growth and development in Guyana.

There is, indeed, a philosophical collision between the two perspectives on Guyana’s development: the one espoused by the PPP/C in Government, which is always for the people, for development, for continuous improvement and expansion, and the one created and espoused – perhaps vicariously, one never knows – by the APNU/AFC, which leads to destruction, reduction of growth, reduction of employment, reduction of activity, all the things which have brought us to the position where we are, that we have to start all over again.

I have to stand with my Comrades and with my other Hon. Members behind the leadership of Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali in recognising that it will be a rugged and difficult road to bring us back. But, we are the ones who will continue to build and develop Guyana. We are committed to developing our country and to bringing a better life for all the people of Guyana.

The exemption of this requirement will remove a great burden with regard to the licence fees, in regard to the running around, in regard to the harassments, in regard to jumping the hurdles and sometimes doing the limbo to get work done in the interior of our country in relation to our miners and their related operators.

With that, I want to recommend that we stand behind this Bill as a singular effort, with regard to the mining industry, to bring it back on the road to development, prosperity and success. *[Applause]*

Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips: Investors and operators in the mining industry have been crying out for the longest while, just like the majority of businessmen in all of the sectors across our country, for Government’s support in helping to foster the environment for economic growth and boosting investor’s confidence.

As they are all well known for being deaf to the cries of the people, the APNU/AFC Administration did only what it knew to do best, that is, ignore the loud cries of our people and turn

a blind eye to the issues affecting persons throughout our country.

The PPP/C Government, which has always served in the best interest of the Guyanese people, because we open our arms and our doors and pay attention to their needs, will continue to do our best to quickly deal with the challenges being faced by our people. We understand and we will stand by them through it all. This measure, which will become effective on 1st October, 2020, will see the complete removal of the requirement for all vehicles used in the mining industry to be registered and have licence fees paid.

If we do not work to provide an investor-friendly environment, then we will be doing an injustice to the people of our country. We must create an environment that allows the private sector to be able to build capacity and increase employment across our country. The role of the private sector is very critical to our country’s progress. Businesses and investors can only contribute to our country’s economic growth if the Government provides the framework to support their operations and encourage continued investment in the industry.

The miners have brought to our attention the inconvenience that the requirements of registration and paying licence fees for mining vehicles have brought to them and their operations. We have listened to them and we will support our miners, just as we pledged to support all other investors and businesspersons throughout Guyana. This is how we will create opportunities for economic growth and expansion in the mining industry, which will, in turn, provide jobs for thousands of people in the sector. It is impossible to think that increasing taxes and fees, and having a whole host of unnecessary requirements that slow and hinder the work of such business operations are in any way, shape or form beneficial to our people and country as a whole. This is backward thinking, which has no place in our PPP/C Government’s plans for advancing our country.

We assure the business community of our continued support and remain committed to working together, towards achieving and improving the conditions for the development, growth and expansion of the mining sector. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

3.22 p.m.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you Cde. Speaker. Like the Prime Minister and, before him, the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs, I rise in support of Bill No.10 of 2020. In keeping with

commitments made to the people of Guyana and in keeping with the measures outlined in our Budget, the Government is making moves to put in place systems to ensure that our people get the relief that they are looking for. The area of mining, like agriculture, which came under severe pressure from the APNU/AFC Government, needs that kind of relief to give persons the confidence to re-invest into the sector and to ensure that the industries and different productive sectors come back on stream at full speed.

The previous Administration was of the view that oil will solve all our problems, that oil was going to make Guyana the land of paradise, that oil would bring Guyanese back home and that oil would make all of us millionaires. It did not learn that oil, if not managed properly, can also bring about the resource curse. I think the Hon. Minister, Mr. Vickram Bharrat, spoke a bit about that – the resource curse as it is called or the Dutch disease.

In *Budget 2020*, the crafters of the Budget, which is our Government of course, His Excellency the President and Vice-President were very much cognisant of this fact. In order for us to avoid falling into that trap where our country can come out worse off if it becomes a victim of the Dutch disease, we need to allocate resources to traditional sectors and also to new and emerging sectors. The world will always need food, so investments, logically, must go into those areas. Oil resources, of course, are not finite and, at some time down the road and given the thrust towards renewable energy, its importance, as we are seeing right now, will become less and less, as the world moves towards addressing greenhouse gas emissions and other issues that contribute to global warming.

It is a matter of survival and that is why, in these slews of measures and Bills that we are discussing today, mechanisms and systems are being put in place, administratively and otherwise, to give the kind of support that the different sectors need to build a platform on which to expand.

Taxes are important, yes, but it is how one would go about collecting it and how one plans. One does not plan for next week or next year. There are five- and 10-years plan and further down the road. We cannot afford to operate like the People's National Congress/Reform (PNC/R) and tax the people double, once there is a deficiency. If one is unable to produce at original rates, how is it that one is going to expand by the doubling of those rates? We recognise, fully, the implication of taxing people too much. Some governments seem to think that 'if it moves' then it should be taxed, 'if it

keeps moving' then it should be regulated and 'if it stops moving' then it should be subsidised. Well, it was moving under the PPP/C, then it continued to move a little bit under the PNC/R and then the PNC/R taxed it more, then it tried to regulate it until it regulated it out of existence. Now, we have to give back the kind of support that is needed.

This is a small measure that will go towards addressing the cost of acquisition of new machinery in the forms of excavators, bulldozers and other heavy-duty machinery. If one should hold on to a piece of equipment or machinery for too long, then the cost to keep it going would keep climbing. If one overly taxes the acquisition of new machinery then producers are forced to stay with the old pieces of equipment which becomes a burden, not only to them but also to the country, because all our spare parts and all other items that go toward making them work must be imported. There is a foreign exchange cost to that and if one does not export then foreign exchange cannot be earned, and if one continues to use all of his or her foreign exchange to go after spare parts, and is prohibited from acquiring new pieces of machinery and equipment because of these taxes, then one is in a circle that one would never be able to get out. This Government, through measures like these, like in Bill No.10 of 2020, where we are seeking to remove the need for these machines to be registered for licenses, will give a break to the sector itself.

We know that if one uses the road, bridges, crossings and ferries, there is a cost for maintenance. But, in the mining sector, by and large, if someone purchases a bulldozer, an excavator or any piece of machine or equipment, it is taken to the location and that location is a private place. Whether it is a mining grant or concession – and Broomes would know much about that – where it goes is a private place and one would do their own maintenance. The cost to take it into the interior is borne by the purchaser who utilises a low-bed or a prime-mover and a truck to take it to its location. That piece of machinery has a licence and [*inaudible*] fees and all of that for the utilisation of the road network. I do not think that the Government is losing in this instance. As a matter of fact, this was well-thought out to give the kind of breaks that is needed and to encourage the purchases of new equipment to retool the industry to be more profitable.

One case in point is this: There are now some new harvesters, the case 560 I think it is, with a header of about 20ft with trackpads 4ft, 4 inches – two of them. Those harvesters can harvest 2000 bags of paddy per day, as against the traditional harvesters of just about 500-600 bags per day. Now, look at

the impact on productivity, immediately, with a piece of machinery like that, given the fact that there is need for weather days for harvesting.

Similarly, in the mining sector, with new and improved machinery and equipment, which one does not have to pay for licence and go through all those costs, one would be bringing in new technology that is more fuel-efficient in terms of emissions, which would not contribute to these dangerous gases.

Overall, it is a win-win situation and, of course, with the increase in productivity, one would get more taxes. This is the argument that I would propose in giving support to Bill No.10 of 2020. I hope that my Colleagues, also, would be of like mind to give total and full support for the passing of this particular piece of legislation.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, we again have two clauses in the Motor Vehicle and Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill 2020 – Bill No. 10 of 2020, and I propose that we take both of these clauses together.

Question put and agreed to.

Clauses 1 and 2

Clauses 1 and 2 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported without amendments, read the third time and passed as printed.

Motions

(11) Confirmation of the Customs (Amendment of First Schedule) Order 2020 – No. 76 of 2020

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That this National Assembly, in accordance with Sections 8 and 9 of the Customs Act, Chapter 82:01, confirm the Customs (Amendment of First Schedule) Order 2020 (No. 76 of 2020) which was made on 21st

September, 2020, under Section 8 of the Customs Act, Chapter 82:01 and published in the Official Gazette dated 21st September, 2020.

[*Minister of Public Works*]

Bishop Edghill: I rise to move the following motion:

“Be It Resolved:

That this National Assembly, in accordance with Sections 8 and 9 of the Customs Act, Chapter 82:01, confirm the Customs (Amendment of First Schedule) Order 2020 (No. 76 of 2020) which was made on 21st September, 2020, under Section 8 of the Customs Act, Chapter 82:01 and published in the Official Gazette dated 21st September, 2020.”

This motion which is proposed, that stands in my name, seeks to do a few things that I would like to explain to this honourable House.

One would recall that, in 2017, the previous Administration, the APNU/AFC visionless Administration, imposed a measure that prohibited the importation of used tyres, which was a big issue for that Administration. This motion is asking for the reversal of that policy along with the removal of the restriction on the importation of vehicles more than eight years old.

3.37 p.m.

This is about making things available, affordable and accessible to the ordinary man.

Let me deal with the vehicles eight years and older. I listened, during the Budget debate, to some of the snide remarks that were made and the attempts to cast some shade as if the PPP/C is backward in allowing vehicles eight years and older to come into the country. I want to bring to the attention of this House some realities. Using current prices from two sites – SBT Global Car Exporter and Trust JapaneseVehicles.com – for a 1500 Cubic Centimetres (CC) vehicle, which is the average size of an Allion, a Primo and an Axio cars, an ordinary man would buy... For a 2012 model, one would have paid taxes of approximately \$1.1 million on a duty paid price of \$2.568 million. If we allow earlier years, the taxes are progressively reduced to \$1.048 million. The duty paid price for a 2005 model vehicle would also be reduced, progressively, from \$2.568 million in 2012 to \$1.7 million. This means that there is a difference of about \$852,000 in savings or a 36% reduction. This is all about affordability.

What this measure, which was imposed by APNU/AFC and for which I said was visionless, means is that... because if one is going to grow the economy then people would be able to buy more expensive vehicles, since they are earning more. But, if one strangulates the economy and taxes people more and puts hardship measures in place then they will have less disposal income and they cannot...

A government with a vision allows things at both ends of the scale. The man who could afford the high-end 2020 model must get access to pay his just dues, while the ordinary man, who wants to go to a bank and make a down payment of \$500,000 and get his Allion, Axio or Primo car, and would pay \$35,000, \$40,000 or maybe \$50,000, must be able to get access to his vehicle.

This thinking that only people who could afford huge sums to acquire up to date model vehicle is an elitist thinking that should not be allowed to continue. What the PPP/C has done is to broaden the pendulum and the scale so that the man who could afford the high-end vehicle gets his vehicle and the man at the bottom-end could also afford his vehicle. A man who had to find \$2.5 million for his vehicle, with \$1.7 million could get his vehicle. The taxi man, the public servant, the schoolteacher and the postman are all people who should drive cars too, not only Members of Parliament (MPs) and big wealthy businessmen. The young professional must be able to own his or her own car too. This measure gives us a wider scope of ownership. The man who is working his taxi, with this measure and with this reversal... A Fielder Wagon could now be acquired for about \$1.7 million as against \$2.1 million, which currently obtains. This could result in a savings of about \$391,000. This measure is allowing for such an opportunity.

Also, in this motion, we are addressing the issues of used tyres. Mr. Speaker, I know that you are a well-travelled man, well exposed to the world, and you would have seen some of those bold signs in places like New York and Miami, 'Used tyres for sale'. I do not know if the Opposition does not know that, even in modern societies, in industrialised societies and in 'First World countries', used tyres are for sale. I do not know if the Members of the Opposition do not know that. We are not talking about used tyres that one puts plants in or plants trees around. We are talking about used tyres that people actually use on vehicles.

Do you know what was the reality, Mr. Speaker? I know that you are very *au fait* with this, especially in the transportation industry. When a taxi man, under the regime of 'you cannot

buy used tyres', gets a puncture on his tyre that has already gone bad, it is one tyre that he is going to buy because he only has money for one new tyre. The car will be out of line, imbalanced and bumpy because he can only buy one tyre at a time.

This measure allows, with certain controls of course, for everyone to be able to maintain their cars. The people who made the argument about used tyres causing accidents, I call upon them to provide any evidence or data to show that cars with used tyres crash more often than cars with new tyres. There is no such evidence, none whatsoever.

Even though, with the imposition of the measure on the ban on used tyres, some prices have fallen, admittedly. Where the prices were all jacked up, the tyres were not selling so it had to be reduced. Many persons still could not afford to purchase of a set of new tyres for their vehicles. As such, many hire car drivers, minibus drivers and motor vehicle drivers would only change one tyre at a time because they cannot afford to change the set of four.

Further, the ban on used tyres and subsequent requirement for importing vehicles to be fixed with tyres for the tread depth of about, at least, six millimetres (MM), essentially meant that used cars would have to be fitted with new tyres before they could be cleared off the wharf. This translated to the ordinary household having to spend an additional \$60,000 for the set of four new tyres before even starting to use their new car. This is what was happening.

A man buying a reconditioned car, does all of his paper work and he imports it. Before the car could leave the wharf, after the man had already saved his money, took a loan, denied himself so many things to get his money for his car, this measure dictated that when he went to collect the car from the wharf, he had to find an additional \$60,000, take off the used tyres from the car and put on the new tyres before he could drive the car out. *Ow*, what a caring Government. That is why they are not in Office. That is exactly why they are not in Office This measure will allow, as I said, for affordability and accessibility.

The third aspect of this motion is the removal of restriction on vehicles cuts. I am sure that, when there are accidents, people look for a front half, a back half and bottom half of a vehicle. The truth about it is as laughable as it might be. A lot of people have to finance their vehicles by taking commercial loans from banks and, as such, whenever parts are needed for repairs, they already have the issue of paying the bank. Then there is the second issue of finding the parts. The vehicle cuts,

or what we call ‘cut vehicles’ or ‘half vehicle’ or so on, are usually acquired at much lower prices, making the cost of spare parts on the local market affordable. These cuts are often stripped and sold as parts at significant reduced prices as compared to accessing, what they would want to call – there are three terms – new, originally new and foreign used.

These restrictions, even though being accused by the Opposition of being private sector friendly – which means ‘rich man’, and I know that they want to say it but they are afraid to do so – show the pro-poor approach of the Government. We are making it easy for young men, young girls, public servants, teacher boys, mailmen and gardeners.

I was quite intrigued when cell phones were introduced, and I saw the horse cart man with his cell phone riding downtown. That was a nice sight. Guyana must come to a place where the public servants, Clerk II and Clerk III, do not have to be standing at a corner waiting on a bus and reaching to work late.

3.52 p.m.

The girl could pick up her children, drop the baby off at the day-care and the son off at the school, and park her car. She could then go to work, get her job done and, in the afternoon, pick up the children from the day-care and school and when she gets her pay cheque it is affordable for her to pay the bank. When she needs tyres to be changed it must be affordable, and when something goes wrong, she must get the spare parts at affordable prices.

Of course, those who are like some of my Hon. Friends in this House, who have the capacity for more luxurious vehicles at the higher end, are catered for and are allowed to import and contribute their fair share of taxes. So, we are making money, but we are also ensuring that the ordinary man benefits as well.

This motion standing in my name is to call on the honourable House to approve this so as to allow the reversal of that backward policy of the ban on the importation of vehicles eight years and older, the ban of used tyres and the ban of the policy of cut vehicles to bring ownership, again, into the reach of the ordinary man and maintenance into the reach of the ordinary man, by ensuring affordability and accessibility.

I ask the House to support this motion standing in my name. Thank you, Sir. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the line-up looks as if we will still have about six or seven contributions. I want to suggest that we take the suspension now.

Sitting suspended at 3.54 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 4.53 p.m.

Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports [Mr. Ramson]: I rise in support of the motion by the Hon. Minister, Bishop Juan Edghill, and to support the removal of more hardships that have been placed on the Guyanese people by the APNU/AFC Government. I am happy to do that on the first part, but I am also disappointed. I am disappointed that the Opposition is not here. I woke up this morning very excited because I knew that I was going to come here and whip them, like they had whipped the Guyanese people for the last five years. Just like they did while they were in Government, they are continuing the same trend, which is collecting the Guyanese people taxpayer’s money for a job and not doing their job – absenting themselves, doing nothing. Mr. Speaker, you are going to need to start addressing this frontally. Maybe you will need to start paying them by the day or paying them by the meals. I bet you that they would start turning up.

This motion that we have here is the reversal of three main things, two in particular on which I would like to place emphasis – cut cars and used spare parts – because the mover of the motion spoke liberally about the third one.

Two things that are being removed here are the eight-year ban for vehicles which the APNU/AFC Government, immediately, when it came into Office, thought was a good idea. The second is the ban on the use of used tyres in Guyana. Even though no one felt that it made sense, it showed, emphatically, that the group did not understand the Guyanese people and the society in which we live. Because they never understood the society and they never understood the circumstances that people faced, is the reason the policies never reflected anything that could improve their lives. It comes from a very philosophical place.

All of their policies come from a very philosophical place, which is the Burnham ideology. He was known for banning things. This is exactly what they did immediately after they came into power and that is to ban used car tyres and ban the importation of vehicles that were older than eight years. It never had a foundation in logic. It also showed that the APNU/AFC did not understand the markets, it did not have an understanding of economics and about how people make their choices about their lives.

When one is in a developing country, one has to be able to make the choices for one's life in the context of one's personal circumstances. One's personal circumstances in a developing economy is that one has to be able to purchase what one could afford, especially, when there is a large informal sector.

What is an informal sector? An informal sector is where there are unregistered businesses where people could go and, what we call in Guyana, *catch deh hand*. This means that they will get a job at these unregistered businesses – a mechanic shop, selling somewhere or welding. They get employment there. It might be for the day, it might be for the week or it could be for the month and there is no formalised arrangement, but they still provide an income for themselves. Because that is an irregular type of situation, one has to be able to purchase what they could afford.

Meanwhile, in a more formalised economy, one could access loans in a more structured way so that one could purchase newer vehicles, buy newer things or get larger mortgages. In these kinds of economies, the policies have to be able to match socio-economic conditions so that they could improve people's lives.

In the context, the policies never matched real life. Vehicles, in particular, are not just a luxurious means of moving from point 'A' to point 'B'. It is also capital. This means that these are equipment that are used in a business or used in the provision of services. When people move from one job to another, sometimes, in life too, one's personal circumstances changes; it does not always go up, it could go down. As a result, one has to be able to match his or her current situation with what one has to do.

In markets, sometimes it goes well and sometimes it does not. If one is not able to afford it, one has to be able to purchase what one could afford. Restricting the importation of vehicles had the opposite effect. What happened was that the prices for the used cars, which were older than eight years, were driven up. Instead of the attempt to have nicer cars on the road, which is what APNU/AFC believed – that one could wave a magic wand and ban things so that poverty is banned – and instead of trying to build and create the conditions where people could build and grow wealth, provide jobs, save and invest which is the cycle upon which people could improve their lives, its plan was to ban poverty. In the process, it had the opposite effect because it drove up prices for the vehicles that were older than eight years.

Now, let us look at the tyres. What was interesting about the tyre argument was that the APNU/AFC said that it caused more accidents, while Bishop Edghill said that there is no evidence to support such. What I found ironic is that the APNU/AFC banned used tyres but were allowing used cars. It made no sense. Instead of that policy of allowing people to use or purchase more newer or more tyres that are new, instead of encouraging that, it had the opposite effect. Because people could not afford it, they used their tyres longer; one saw the steel around the tyres which made it far more unsafe. When, ordinarily, a man could go to one of the vulcanising shops or the tyre shops, knowing that he has a tyre that had gone bad and switches it for a used tyre because he could afford it and he would pay \$5,000 or a \$6,000 to get another tyre to replace it, instead, because he could not get enough used tyres on the market, he would have had to purchase a newer tyre for \$20,000 and upwards. He would have to, now – because he did not have as much disposable income, he was overtaxed, there was not enough jobs in the economy and there was not enough movement of money in the economy – use his tyres longer which made it far more unsafe as a result. There was a name for these tyres. They called it a merit. The *tyremen*, over the last five years, came up with a new name for tyres that are worn. They called it a merit.

One ended up in a situation where there were people who were running the country, who did not understand the people that they were attempting to rule, did not understand the circumstances under which people lived, and did not understand the people's personal circumstances. That is why their economic policy never matched the country.

It is a very similar situation where their political philosophy is not matching the country. What they did not realise is that the country had changed. The country had become crystallised in its belief that it is a democratic country that believes in freedom. Their policy of rigging elections and everything else no longer matched the country that we became. That is exactly what happened with their economic policy. That is why 30,000 jobs were lost over the last five years. There were more tax rates and Guyana was the most taxed country that one would have ever seen. That is why one has seen them lose power.

Mr. Speaker, I do not want to be any longer, but I would like to say that what we have seen here today is the fulfilment of promises, which is something that we could teach the other side if they were here. We will continue to teach them because we now have to be able to bring them along with us.

We have to bring them along into the Guyana that is a modern Guyana, a Guyana that believes in freedom and democratic principles and the uplifting of peoples' lives; something that they do not believe in. What they believed in were things that could benefit themselves and rigging elections.

5.05 p.m.

It was never about people. I am happy to be able to support this measure because this is a representation of the policies that you will get from the People's Progressive Party/Civic in Government, which will be always about the benefit of people and how we advance their lives.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Motion put and agreed to.

(12) Affirmation of the Value-Added Tax (Amendment) Regulations 2020 – No. 2 of 2020

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly, in accordance with Section 95 of the Value-Added Tax Act, Chapter 81:05, affirm the Value-Added Tax (Amendment) Regulations 2020 (No. 2 of 2020) which was made on 21st September, 2020, under Section 95 of the Value-Added Tax Act, Chapter 81:05 and published in the Official Gazette dated 21st September, 2020.”

[*Minister of Public Works*]

Bishop Edghill: I move the following motion:

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly, in accordance with Section 95 of the Value-Added Tax Act, Chapter 81:05, affirm the Value-Added Tax (Amendment) Regulations 2020 (No. 2 of 2020) which was made on 21st September, 2020, under Section 95 of the Value-Added Tax Act, Chapter 81:05 and published in the Official Gazette dated 21st September, 2020.”

This motion to affirm, in this honourable House, this amendment to the regulations that have been made is the one motion that will cause singing and dancing in every home this evening and continually in Guyana because this is the measure that really takes the burdens off of people's backs.

The first thing that this regulation seeks to do is to reverse the value-added tax (VAT) on water and electricity. If we spoke about them in the Budget debate and we did not gazette and bring these regulations into being, it would have all been fluff. This afternoon, with the sincerity that accompanies our way of doing business, we are ensuring that there is an affirmation by way of making this motion into a resolution, to ensure what was promised is actualised. Those who are responsible for the implementation will have no excuse. Notice is given that this is the new dispensation, the new order and the new way things are being done in Guyana.

Water is life. When we were in Government in the 2011 to 2015 period, every time there was a blackout somebody will call and ask, Minister, when are you fixing this ‘thing’. In the 2015 to 2020 period, the sarcasm was there. I apologise on behalf of the Government. We have to ensure, every day, that people get water and electricity. They want these uninterrupted and it is not an unreasonable demand. Do you know what the APNU/AFC did? Apart from charging the rates to ensure that these utilities were able to sustain themselves – both the Guyana Power and Light (GPL) Incorporated and the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) are companies that have been established, even though the shareholder is the Government – they have been made companies to be run in a particular manner. Their rates and everything are factored into the companies' profiles to ensure their economic viability. The Granger Administration decided that, after the power and water companies made their profits, the Government had to make money too to ensure that they were able to sustain, expand and cover the costs of operation. It empowered the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) to tax and receive revenues of VAT on water and electricity.

We, in the Opposition at that time, the PPP/C, cried out against it and said that it was a hardship and an imposition that was unreasonable, unconscionable and not well thought out. The people had to limp along because that Granger Administration and the Members who were part of his Cabinet and part of the legislature, at that time, were tone deaf. It did not matter what one said, they were tone deaf. Well, that is why they are where they are and we understand that. With support for this motion, as of the 1st October, I am happy to pronounce to the nation of Guyana that we are removing the VAT on water and electricity.

Mr. Speaker, let me tell you what this means. There are about 49,000 consumers, residential and non-residential, who will no longer have to pay VAT. The average residential water bill is about \$3600 monthly, which means that one has to pay

VAT of \$442 every month because his or her consumption exceeds \$1500. A VAT free allowance threshold, with the new measure, means that you are foregoing that money that you have to pay every month. You could add it up and see the value at the end of every year. It is more money in the hands of ordinary people. Thanks to the People's Progressive Party/Civic.

As it relates to electricity, there are about 45,000 consumers who would no longer have to pay the 14% VAT on energy consumption. If a household pays about \$12,000 in electricity every month, it incurs a charge of almost \$1,680 in VAT on the electricity bill. The people who have pre-paid metres know that if they put \$1,680 in their metres, they will have lights running, but that was not going towards electricity, that was going towards VAT. This motion that is on the floor, of which I ask this House to adopt and pass, will ensure that those households have the monthly releases of not having to add that additional money to their electricity bill. From 1st October, electricity will be free from VAT.

Mr. Speaker, I told you that every household would be singing and dancing, but that is just water and electricity. This motion also addresses the issue of VAT on building and construction materials. If a man goes to the sawmill to buy some lumber to repair his stairs, fix his water trestle or change his windows, there is VAT everywhere. Because we understand home ownership, we understand construction as job creators and as a tool for the development of improving livelihoods. Could you imagine, Mr. Speaker, the man in Sophia who squatted, or someone in Plastic City who built a squatter's settlement that was regularised and has an outside latrine and is now trying to build a septic tank with a proper water cistern, when they will go to buy their materials and all the rest of it, having struggled as a carpenter, labourer or a clerk... The Government wants to make a profit off of the improvement of people's lives. Now, the PPP/C says, *No way Jose*. We are going to give back to the people. Rather than paying the VAT, one could fix his or her septic tank, buy the water cistern and start to tile his or her bathroom with the money. That is the kind of improvement and development.

When people ask how the Budget is benefitting the people, those who are listening now understand how. The removal of VAT on building and construction materials also means that a lot of the public works ... Take for example, the Minister of Housing and Water, the Minister of Education, the Minister of Health and the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports who have significant amounts of buildings under their charge, whether they are schools, hospitals, health centres or

community centres, when we go to repair and maintain all of these building, the cost of getting that done is now 14% less because of the removal of VAT on construction and building materials. The man who is building a church could now build it at 14% cheaper. This is because, when he goes to buy his building materials to build his temple, mosque or cathedral, as the case may be, he could get it done at 14% cheaper. I am sure that some people are saying Hallelujah. This is what the PPP/C is doing for the people of Guyana.

5.20 p.m.

We are not making a profit off of people's progress. We are aiding and encouraging people's progress. It has to do with a philosophy, the underpinning and the promise on which we operate as a political outfit – pro-poor, pro-government, pro-growth and pro-people in our measures.

Not only will VAT be removed from water and electricity and from building and construction materials... Everyone has two, some has three cellular phones. Mr. Speaker, these days, you know the prices of cellular phones more than anyone in this House. When people already expend significant amounts of money... By the way, Mr. Speaker, you would agree with me that a cellular phone is no longer a luxury, it is an absolute necessity. So, let us not talk about luxury, we are talking about necessities. To not have a cellular phone is almost like not having oxygen. Some people cannot function and maintain contact with their children and their spouses. It is a security mechanism. It is a way of communication and where one gets their news. From cellular phones, some of my Colleagues who are here are monitoring their enterprises, wherever they are. It is a necessity.

This motion that is on the floor is to remove VAT on cellular phones. A smart phone device, which carries a \$43,000 price tag at one of our mobile carriers, would attract VAT of approximately \$6000, pushing the final cost for that device to nearly \$50,000. With this measure, one no longer has to worry about the additional \$6000. That \$6000 can be used to ensure that the family has internet access to use the phone. This is because they can take the \$6000 that they had to pay VAT and buy internet service, so that they could have the optimal use of their device. This is the way the PPP/C thinks and conceptualises things, so that when we advocate measures it is for the benefit of the people. This motion is bringing real value to the people of Guyana.

I have already spoken about the removal of VAT on water, electricity, building and construction materials and cellular phones, but I want to bring some hope to our miners, our

foresters and the people involved in the agricultural sector. We are removing VAT on all all-terrain vehicles (ATVs). My Colleagues, the Minister of Amerindian Affairs and the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development, who have to traverse our mountainous regions, and my Colleagues, like Members of Parliament Mr. Charlie, Mr. Williams and Ms. Browne, know that an ATV is the equivalent of a sport utility vehicle (SUV). This is because, in some places, even if they buy a SUV it is the ATV that has to carry them there. There are no roads. I have had the opportunity of travelling on some of the ATVs; traveling, safely being escorted by people who know how to use those things.

Mr. Speaker, think about this: An ATV costs \$2 million or \$3 million depending on the size and when one is finished buying it, he or she has to pay 14% VAT. The VAT alone could be fuel for the ATV for the next six months. That is what we are doing by this measure. The miners, the men who have to traverse the dams to get down into the rice fields; the man with the power saw, who is leaving Ituni, Hururu, Ebini and Wikki Kalkuni to go deep into the forest to cut his logs, with an ATV he can get in there and work and come back home in the afternoon to his wife and children and have a beautiful evening, breakfast the next morning and return to work. We are making this affordable.

Do you want me to tell you more? A lot of our health workers, at health huts, sometimes this is the only way they can move medicine, vaccines and even, sometimes, patients to get them to certain locations to get airplanes for medical evacuations. They come out from various areas on these ATVs. The Granger Administration decided that it would profit off of people's pain. This motion, this evening, is removing VAT on ATVs, but not only removing VAT on ATVs. Rice farmers, listen up, we are taking the VAT off of the tractors. Some model-90 tractors, inclusive of VAT, would cost around \$8.5 million dollars – \$8.5 million for a model-90 tractor. Just taking off the VAT, that same tractor could be acquired for \$7.4 million – a saving of \$1 million. Every farmer who goes to buy a tractor must say thanks to the PPP/C because he is saving \$1 million.

Let us talk about the miners. Mr. Benn spoke about how many years he spent in the 'bush' as a geologist and a scientist by training and practice. I only visited the 'bush' for days, but I saw the men with those excavators. A miner who is investing in a model 320 excavator, with VAT, he has to pay \$43 million. Without VAT, as a result of this measure, for the same excavator, he will pay \$37.7 million dollars – a

savings of \$5.2 million. So, every miner, when they go to their place of choice to buy their excavator, remember, thanks to the PPP/C for the removal of VAT, they have \$5.2 million in their pockets. Do you know what that miner could do with the \$5.2 million? He could 'ration up' for four months, he could get a truck, get some men and move them into the concession or the mining claim and get the work done. Those are just two examples that I am giving you, Sir.

You might say that the man is buying a tractor and that the man is buying an excavator, but let us come down to the *low gravy*, as people say. The chainsaw – the man with a model 651 chainsaw, if he goes to buy that chainsaw, with VAT, he will have to pay \$184,000. Now, with this new measure, that same chainsaw would cost about \$161,000 – a saving of \$22,000. Everyone is benefiting from that measure. This measure also involves the removal of VAT on capital equipment.

This measure also includes the removal of VAT on fertilisers, agrochemicals, pesticides, and key inputs in the poultry industry and zero-rating of the poultry industry. In order to ensure that all inputs into the poultry production are made available from 1st October, 2020, there will be no VAT on fertilisers, agrochemicals, pesticides and key inputs into the poultry sector, including poultry feed, building materials and packaging. We would also be reverting the poultry industry to bring zero-rated VAT status. This will boost the sector's production across small, medium and large-scale producers. Poultry farmers across the country could now accelerate expansion plans so that they could take advantage of the increased demand for poultry, while keeping prices affordable to consumers.

This measure, as well, includes the removal of VAT on medical supplies. The Budget will see medical supplies, including over-the-counter-drugs, vitamins, minerals and tonics, shifting to zero-rated items, which means that consumers can now expect to see overtime reduced prices when they visit pharmacies. This motion is reducing VAT on medical supplies.

This measure provides tax concessions on investments for agro-processing facilities, cold storage and packaging. The Government will be affording tax concessions on investments in agro-processing facilities and cold storage and packaging. This will serve to incentivise much needed growth in value-added production within the agriculture sector. Facilitating these types of investments would yield higher value products which, in turn, would result in improved earnings and

economic growth. In addition to the application of zero-rated VAT on goods and services in the agro-processing facilities, cold storage and packaging, the Administration has removed import taxes on these items which range from 5% to 20%. Apart from the removal of VAT, we have also reduced the tax.

All of these amendments that I am speaking about and their reversals, take effect from 1st October, 2020, with the successful passage of this motion tonight, and I ask the National Assembly to so do.

Thank you very much. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Minister of Public Works. Prime Minister... Is it the Hon. Attorney General first?

5.35 p.m.

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]: The Prime Minister has asked to be withdrawn from the list of speakers.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Member. Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs Mohabir Nandlall you have the floor.

Mr. Nandlall: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Hon. Minister of Public Works was quite elaborate in his presentation in support of the motion, so I will be very brief. Sitting here and reflecting upon what transpired, when these Bills or these measures had been imposed by the other side, is a very enlightening experience. When one examines the breadth of the measures, the level of increases, the financial burdens that they imposed, and the so many areas of endeavours that they embraced, one gets a sense that there was some measure or there is an appearance as if there was some measure of cruelty on the other side. It was as if they wished to punish the Guyanese people.

They campaigned in 2015 on a platform of less taxes and on the reduction of VAT. We are witnessing here, again, not only the imposition of 200 tax measures, but the imposition of taxation on items that were never taxable before in the history of this country. Water and electricity never had a tax in Guyana, even during the Burnham years. Never! It is mind boggling as to what may have inspired this. It could not have been Mr. Jordan alone. This decision would have been made by a collective, sitting at a Cabinet, deliberating on whether or not to impose these measures, to what extent and how broad the net should be. Imposing VAT on water is not an ordinary measure in any country in the world. These

measures were imposed on a population that is so small, comparatively, and on the heels of the discovery of a billion barrels of oil – the largest oil find in the Western Hemisphere in recent years. It is not that the Minister of Finance was projecting poverty. It is not that the country is facing impending impoverishment. In fact, we are facing an eminent prosperity. We are on a path described by others as ‘the path to Dubai’ and then we have a Government going to an electorate in one year and a half and imposing tax measures of this magnitude and to this degree of burden.

I continue to say that this grouping, that held the reins of Government, has distinguished themselves, in so many respects, as being a special group of people. There is no other way, the more I think about it. I saw, for example, a few days ago, the Leader of the Opposition, Lt. Col (Ret’d) Harmon, on television expressing that specialty that I am speaking about. When in defence of his party’s Green State Development Strategy (GSDS), he said that policy has been with us since independence. This is because, if one checks the National Anthem, it describes Guyana as: ‘Green Land of Guyana’. That is the Leader of the Opposition’s understanding of an environmental policy. Those who are listening to me can go and verify it. He was speaking about the decision to repaint the State House white and remove the green colour. It is a blessing in disguise – well, not in disguise, it is a blessing without disguise that the people of Guyana have removed them from here. This is because I cannot imagine five more years of this style of Government.

The other issue that we must continue to highlight is that they have increased the revenue base of the country and they have collected so many more taxes. On water alone, they collected nearly \$28 billion in VAT for one year. What have they done with the money? That remains to me the greatest mystery, because we have inherited the country. Where is the money that they have amassed that they have taken from the Guyanese people with these tax measures? They have nothing to show. Look at the expenditures from January to August – \$170 billion. What is there to show? All of the extra budgetary funds are empty and are in deficit.

Forestry, one of our richest sectors, is in financial problems. They drained the housing fund and the lottery fund. We really have to do deep forensic examinations in this country to understand where this money went, because it is not evident in the accounting records of our country. It is neither in the treasury nor in the authorised places outside of the treasury. We have a lot of enquires and audits to be conducted.

They have not done any significant capital projects, so no one knows where the money has gone. The D'Urban Park is a *drop in the ocean*, when one compares it to the amount of money that they would have amassed from these measures alone. Licensing fees collected by the Government was about \$3 billion – just miscellaneous licencing fee. Where did that money go? The Commissioner-General faithfully collected it. What did they do with the money? It is not the Commissioner-General, he is only the collector. So, we are giving back to the people of Guyana that, of course, which they are entitled to, but we do not know where the people's moneys are that have been received. The people are entitled to know that.

Electricity in Guyana, as it is now, stands as one of the most expensive in the world. Our rate per kilowatt/ hour in Guyana is five times more expensive than in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and it is four times more expensive than in New York. When we tried to rid that burden from the backs of the Guyanese people by proceeding with the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, after about 40 years of studies and feasibility examinations, they cut it out of the Budget when we finally got the project.

I am saying and the more I think and the more I speak, the more convinced I am that there is a sadistic mentality that guided governance from the other side. There is a punitive component, as if they wanted to punish the people of this country. When they killed the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, they brought in the Norwegians, who advised them that it was the best project available and then they did not have the money to start it back. Mr. Jordan confessed that, publicly.

The first opportunity we had to bring this country back to prosperity or to put it on a certain path to prosperity, was the oil platform. They have shackled us with the worst oil contract ever executed on planet Earth. Now, we have to re-negotiate and we have to issue licences within given parameters, and they are now on the outside criticising. Having shackled us to some contractual arrangements, they are now criticising from the outside. They did not have the decency to disclose the contract to us. We took two years as a people before we were able to see the contract. They denied ever receiving a signing bonus.

Knowing that energy is so important to this country and knowing that our people suffer so much to pay electricity bills, there is no greater theft for electricity per capita in any part of the world, right now, more than in Guyana. We know

that. Anybody dealing with the energy sector will know that. They must know that. Guyanese cannot afford to pay electricity; that is the truth. And then, on top of that, you go and impose 14% VAT. This is cruelty. It is cruelty. They never brought forward any compelling reason to show why we needed to impose VAT on water and electricity—none at all. One morning we came, they passed a budget and then we hear that there are some budgetary measures. That was it for the first time in the history of the country. Mr. Burnham, as bad as he was, never imposed taxation on agricultural equipment. Never.

5.50 p.m.

But, Mr. Greenidge was a horrible Minister of Finance. I could imagine what category Mr. Jordan meets.

Today, we are returning money into the pockets of the Guyanese people.

The other components that I must offer comments on are the three major components encompassed by this Bill: Water, electricity and healthcare – the removal of value-added tax on healthcare and healthcare equipment. The Bishop said that water is life, and that is true. Electricity is light. The Hindus say *Maha Laxmi*, the Goddess of Light.

Those three encompassed in one Bill, I believe, collectively, make the point that I want to make about cruelty. Not satisfied with taxing water and electricity, the then Government taxed medical equipment and medical supplies. To drink water became more expensive, to get light in homes became more expensive and to remain healthy to live became more expensive. You are telling me that was not a cruel Government and a Government which imposed components of cruelty as part of its government style. This is the evidence of it.

I hope the Guyanese people, when they reflect upon these measures and issues, understand the importance of their votes and how important the decision was to remove the APNU/AFC from Government.

Today, we should make a pledge in this House and in this country, as we conclude these debates and having regard to the measures that we are discussing, that the APNU/AFC must never return to Government in Guyana. I thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Motion put and agreed to.

(13) AFFIRMATION OF THE MOTOR VEHICLES AND ROAD TRAFFIC (AMENDMENT OF FIRST SCHEDULE) REGULATIONS 2020 – NO. 3 OF 2020

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That this National Assembly, in accordance with Section 98(3) of the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, Chapter 51:02, affirm the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic (Amendment of First Schedule) Regulations 2020 (No. 3 of 2020) which was made on 21st September, 2020, under Section 98(3) of the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Act, Chapter 51:02 and published in the Official Gazette dated 21st September, 2020.”

Mr. Benn: Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members, on the question of the affirmation of the Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic (Amendment of First Schedule) Regulations 2020 – No. 3 of 2020, the amendment of these regulations is to give effect to the reduction of the [inaudible] licence fees by 50% of the previously increased amounts, with the exception of licencing fees payable under the said Regulations and shall come into operation on 1st October, 2020.

As previously outlined, the increase of these fees ranges between 100% to 500% and were amongst the hundreds of fees imposed, in the last five years by the previous Administration, on all licences, fees and charges. Being burdensome to the ordinary man and in keeping with the PPP/C’s manifesto to redress these wrongs, they have been reduced. The fees in these Regulations are over 100 in number and outlined in the Bill before you which, in the essence of time, I hope that the Hon. Members of the House have so acquainted themselves.

Much has been said about the impost at all levels of the taxation system in respect of licences and other impost, with respect to what I term before as ‘the regressive taxation regime’ of the previous APNU/AFC Government. The Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs just said – and I completely agree with him – that there is a component and a large measure of cruelty in all these taxation measures and impost, which were imposed on the Guyanese people over the last five years by the APNU/AFC Government.

Jamaican Reggae icon, Burning Spear, talked about the betrayal of Marcus Garvey. We may not agree with everything that he proposed but he asked the question, *where is bagawire?* Where are the persons who created the situation which have brought people into the circumstances in which

we are? I am aware now, in the first instance, why the Guyanese people, with extreme and great difficulty, discarded the APNU/AFC from the [inaudible].

I am also now aware that the former President, Mr. Granger, is no longer in the line-up over there in the seats of the APNU/AFC [inaudible]. The bellicose Minister of Finance, Mr. Jordan, while he was being warned in respect of these matters, in respect of the taxes he was proposing, and when he was being heckled and when there was a large amount of writing in all of the newspapers with respect to the damage these taxes would put on the Guyanese people, went straight ahead and imposed the taxes and other measures. He is now a discard and is no longer in this House.

This is a teething and learning moment for all of us and a very important day as to the choices we make at the individual and personal levels in respect of how our country will proceed, in respect of how we come together as a people in Guyana and in respect of the best course we could chart for the development of our country. I have to say, on this side of the House, we, unreservedly, stand with the course chartered by the PPP/C in its manifesto under the leadership of Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo and Prime Minister, Brigadier Mark Phillips.

The warnings which we had given, previously, from 2015 to now, with respect to these measures have come to pass. It is not that we desired it, but we knew what would happen once they took the measures which they took. We still have the bellicose Mr. Patterson and Mr. Ramjattan over there. Of course, they are cowardly enough not to show up today to *face the music*, to face the people and to face this honourable House to, maybe, apologise, at least, or to say sorry for the damage they have done to people and to the country.

I say, again, in five years and even less than five years, the APNU/AFC underdeveloped Guyana. Take away the oil investments and all of the other things, which they chuckled and laughed about, and the life of our people, the life of ordinary people, professionals, young people, ‘starter people’ and young couples have grown much worse.

I spoke before about the contrasting and conflicting philosophical issues between the two sides. The Hon. Member, the Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, did say something about the idea of the green economy and the absence of the moneys which were accumulated. I heard it was over \$90 billion in tax revenues that had been accumulated over what was previously there, and there is nothing to show for it. It is not in the official accounts and

other places, and nowhere on the ground is there any significant infrastructural development in relation to the work that they had done.

As was said before, they discarded what we called the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS), for which we were nominated and for which we got a Champion of the Earth, Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo. He was recognised, internationally, with respect to this. We got the support of the Norwegians who brought money into this country in relation to our LCDS – some US\$170 million, followed by the Champion of the Earth. Thank you, Sir.

They picked up the idea of a Green State Development Strategy. The Green State Development Strategy and the ‘green’ economy only seemed to be related to painting all Government buildings and everything that they did green and wearing green clothing. There was nothing new. It was about painting everything green. It was childishness and not statesmanlike and not anything that you can build on solidly, in reality, as a foundation for the development of the country.

These measures, as I have said before, in the affirmation, relate to reducing, by 50%, the number of increases which were made by the APNU/AFC Government. The fees, if I were to attempt to read out some of them, by exemption are: In respect of driver’s licences, one would now be saving \$500 on the purchase of a hire car driver’s licence and, similarly, for a private car driver’s licence. An international driver’s license is \$1000.

6.05 p.m.

In respect of a dealer’s licence, it was cut from \$200,000 to \$150,000 – a savings of \$50,000. Issues like competence and failure, there would be savings of \$750. Some of these may not appear significant in themselves here, but they are significant to the persons who go out and attempt to acquire and pay for these services.

In relation to a motorcycle, there is a savings of \$250, yielding \$750 for the fee. For busses and goods vehicles for an articulated vehicle, \$1000 to \$3000 savings for the fees which are now to be put in place. For an ATVs, which was spoken of before, it is now reduced from \$2,250 to \$1500 – a savings of \$750. For goods vehicles exceeding 3000 pounds and not exceeding 4000 pounds, it is now reduced from \$6,000 to \$5,000 – a savings of \$1,000. For those exceeding 5000 pounds there is a saving of \$2,500, from \$15,000 to \$12,500. For a minibus carrying not more than 14 passengers, there is a savings of \$1,338; the fee is now \$6,187. For a

minibus carrying more than 14 passengers there is a savings of \$2,340; the fee is now \$11,700. In respect of a vehicle exceeding 13,440 pounds unladen weight, there is a saving of \$7,500. The licence fee is now \$37,500. For motor tractors and trailers within a radius of six miles of Georgetown, there would be a savings of \$900. The licence fee would now be \$4,500. Any agriculture tractor used alone for the said purpose, there would be a savings of \$150; it is now \$750 for the licence. Even a motor hearse had impost raised on it. The license fee is now \$1,500 from \$1,800. In excess of 50 items in terms of the affirmation for the motor vehicle’s affirmation are in this document for our acceptance.

I say, again, that the relentless pursuit of the common person of any endeavour that people undertake to garner and to get in taxes is a predatory activity. What, in my view, had been going on is a situation – not only for this situation but, in respect of the other presentations which were made – is that there was a Government which sucked out the live blood of the Guyanese economy and sucked the energy and enterprise out of the Guyanese people. They made it difficult for people to undertake daily lifetime activities and the development of their families and communities.

We, on this side of the House, and, of course, in the absence of those who should otherwise, perhaps, have been here, will unreservedly continue to support the situation where the efforts of the poor and their development, the working man and the working people, are supported. This is so that our country can develop faster and so that our agriculture and industries are developed to the point where they are sustainable and self-supporting.

In respect of the affirmation with respect to these measures, I want to ask this honourable House to support the said affirmation. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Ramson: I rise in support of the motion presented by the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs, Mr. Benn, in relation to the fulfilment of another campaign promise, which is the reduction of the taxes that had been imposed by the APNU/AFC and which caused hardships to the Guyanese people. We made it a priority by doing it within the first two months of our time in Office.

This motion alone reduces 48 additional taxes that had been raised, unilaterally, without consultation and justification by the APNU/AFC and contributed to what now has become common knowledge in Guyana.

We must always, at every single moment, remind the Guyanese people that the APNU/AFC Government had taken an extra \$91 billion out of their pockets. At the same time, while they were taking money out of ordinary people's pockets, they were also giving away our national patrimony, which is supposed to benefit all Guyanese. In one single deal, the APNU/AFC gave away over US\$55 billion. Brigadier (Ret'd) David Granger, as the President of this country, who ultimately was responsible as the then leader of this country, sat down and saw that transpire and said nothing about it, did nothing about it and tied our hands to that deal.

I have heard, also, some reasons being proffered on this side of the House as to why it is that these measures were imposed on the Guyanese people. The suggestion was that the APNU/AFC wanted to punish Guyanese people. That could be a good explanation, but I also would like the public and my Comrades on this side of the House to consider an alternative reason. When they imposed these additional tax measures and they raked in more revenue, it created more opportunities for 'hustle'. That motivation, I am suggesting, was the reason. They never cared about how it affected people in this country because their intention, from day one, was to rig the election.

In 2015, I remember distinctly having conversations, at the end of that year and early in 2016, in which people were saying that they knew that they were going to be a one-time Government; I remember those conversations. Being involved in politics, I know when people assume power, which is their ultimate objective when they are involved in politics, they want to change lives. Nobody would assume power with the intention of losing power.

So, when they raised their salaries by 50% and when they start imposing all of these measures so that people felt hardships, they did not care. They did not respond to it. They knew that when they did not respond to it, it was because their intention was to rig the elections all along. It was not so that they could go back to the electorate in five years and say that their measures and policies had improved the people's lives and, as a result, they should vote again for them. It was so that they could rake in more money for themselves off of the backs of Guyanese people, creating *beasts of burden* for the Guyanese people. It was to get more money for the Government so that they could have raked in more 'hustle' for themselves. It is a very sad situation.

The allegations that I am hearing, coming out of what was happening then, is that when one got a contract, 60% went to

the previous Minister. That is why a lot of these contracts were not done. They were not fulfilled. That is why you saw a lot of them who came in here with old vehicles now driving Mercedes-Benz, buying \$100 million properties in Republic Park and building mansions. There is one of them that they call the four-lot mansion. It looks like the National Library. Another one has a big housing scheme in the Region 5 area. It was all within five years. There is another one who collected \$17 million in Palm Court and was so drunk that \$3 million disappeared.

I am suggesting that an alternative theory is that it was not so much that they intended to punish people, they were only interested in themselves. That is what it was. This is the same old People's National Congress (PNC) way. Their sole intention, while they were in power, prior to 1992, was to occupy a position of power and use it for their own economic and financial benefits.

That is why, in the last five years, not a single person from the Government went out into communities and told people how it is that they were going to make money and how they were going to improve their own lives through wealth creation. They could not have gone and done it because they did not know themselves. Show me the people in the PNC who had created wealth for themselves off the market. They do not know how to use money and they do not know how to make money. The only method of creating wealth for themselves was to occupy a position in the State and use that so that they could have received bribes and, at the same time, become parasites on the Guyanese people.

I am so happy that two things happened. Number one, is that we have gotten rid of them and we are never going to see them back in Government for a very long time.

6.24 p.m.

I am also happy that this country is far more transparent and connected so they were able to see for themselves who the PNC and AFC really are.

It is not a surprise for me to see all those threats of resignations coming now, while they are in Opposition. When they were in Government and hundreds of tax measures were going on the backs of Guyanese, all the hustles and scandals that went on and the giving away of our national patrimony, there was not a single resignation.

This is yet another example of the People's Progressive Party/Civic fulfilling its manifesto's promises and it is a sign

and the signal of what is to come over the next five years. Every promise that we have made, while we were campaigning...We will never break our promises like Brigadier Granger and the APNU/AFC did. We will fulfil all our promises to the people of this country. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Motion put and agreed to.

Motion carried.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this concludes our business for today. Before I call on the Hon. Prime Minister, please bear with us and remember that this is not our permanent home. We ask that you take all your personal belongings with you because we cannot guarantee that you will find them when you come back. It could be in storage, as I had left my documents and it was in storage. You would want to take them home with you this evening.

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“Mr. Speaker, I move the adjournment of the Assembly to a date and time to be fixed.”

[*Prime Minister*]

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Speaker, I move the adjournment of the Assembly to a date and time to be fixed.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: The Assembly now stands adjourned to a date to be fixed.

Adjourned accordingly at 6.28 p.m.